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CR Consumer Reports®

MAY + JUNE 2025

735 PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED

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Contents

MAY + JUNE 2025, VOL. 90 NO. 4

P. 28

735
PRODUCTS RATED & REVIEWED

P. 40

P. 48

FEATURES

28 **10 Really Risky Foods Right Now**
Some grocery store staples, like deli meats, eggs, and onions, may carry dangerous bacteria. Our expert advice can help you stay safe.

40 **Get Rid of Stubborn Stains**
We've got the best ways to keep even the worst messes from ruining your carpets, upholstery, and more.
RATINGS

48 **Worried About Your Memory?**
Forgetfulness can be a normal part of aging–but sometimes it's more serious. Here's how to know the difference. Plus: Simple strategies for remembering better.

PRODUCTS RATED IN THIS ISSUE

LAWN MOWERS
P. 8

ELECTRIC BIKES
P. 9

TVs
P. 58

AIR FRYERS
P. 72

TOASTER OVENS
P. 78

CHEVROLET TRAVERSE
P. 107

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

Contents

Good Deals Ahead
Our tech pros share their favorite picks.

FEATURES

56 Do You Need to Pay More for Great Stuff?
No! There's plenty of top-notch tech gear–from laptops to smartwatches and more–for every budget.
RATINGS

64 'I Need a Little Help Here!'
Moving something heavy. Painting a door. Cleaning the gutters. It can be hard to find a pro for smaller jobs at home. Our advice will make it easier.

70 CR's Ultimate Guide to Countertop Appliances
This special 29-page section has all the buying advice you need for toaster ovens, mixers, coffee makers, and more, plus ratings for 480 products.
RATINGS

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RATINGS Overall Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100. We rate products using these symbols:

WORSE — BETTER

IN EVERY ISSUE

4 **From the President: Greetings From Our New CEO**
Meet Phil Radford, CR's new president and CEO.

5 **Building a Better World, Together**
We're working to make food safer and protect drivers' data privacy.

6 **Your Feedback**
Readers' comments about our recent content.

19 **Recalls**

112 **Index**

113 **The Better Deal**

DEPARTMENTS & COLUMNS

8 **What We're Testing in Our Labs ...**
Lawn mowers, garbage disposals, dehumidifiers, and more.
RATINGS

10 **Ask Our Experts**
Advice on sunscreen expiration, the best type of oil for your car, and whether to cover your laptop's camera when it's not in use.

11 **Insights**
Healthier frozen treats, saving money on gasoline, dishwasher deals, and more.
RATINGS

PRODUCT UPDATE

20 **The Best Air Conditioners From Our Tests**
Smart design upgrades have made the latest models quieter and more efficient than ever.
RATINGS

ROAD REPORT

99 **Ahead of the Curve**
Auto ratings, news, and advice.

100 **The Cars Owners Love Most**
Our member satisfaction survey reveals the vehicles you would buy or lease again.
RATINGS

106 **What Those Warning Lights Mean**
Here's a decoder for the symbols on your dashboard.

107 **Road Test**
We rate the Chevrolet Traverse, Mini Cooper, Ram 1500, and Toyota Land Cruiser.
RATINGS

SUBSCRIPTION NEWS

Starting with this issue, your one-year subscription includes six bimonthly issues (each containing two months of content) plus the digital Buying Guide. We will be offering the same great reporting and award-winning features that serve to protect consumers, as well as thousands of product ratings and the expert insight you rely on for your home, car, tech, health, and food. And for even more, head to **CR.org** for more great content and special benefits.

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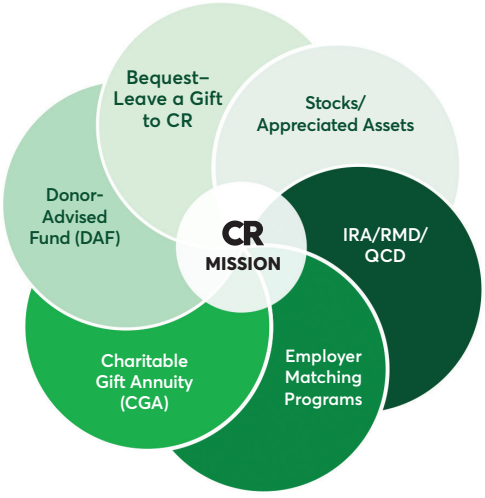

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Greetings From Our New CEO

I'M PHIL RADFORD, and as the new president and CEO of Consumer Reports, I'm honored to be connecting with CR's members here for the first time.

Joining CR has been both a dream come true and a return to my professional roots working at consumer watchdog organizations. From tackling abusive banking fees at Public Interest Research Group to challenging unfair economic policies at Public Citizen, fighting for consumer rights and protections has been a decades-long passion, and I'm deeply excited to continue that work.

I also have a personal connection to CR. As a parent–like so many others, I suspect–I spent many nights desperately trying to coax my newborn back to sleep while also going through CR's reporting about the latest recalls, what to buy, and what will keep my family safe.

In the past few months, I've gotten to see up close the profound impact CR has on millions of Americans. So many spend their money more wisely thanks to our trusted ratings and reviews, and pursue their lives in a safer and fairer marketplace because of our investigations and advocacy.

But there is much more work to be done, as consumers face a growing number of challenges, from companies that have gotten so big they no longer have to compete on price or service to tech companies that spy on us and then sell what they learn to the highest bidder.

There are over 500 people at CR who are dedicated to improving lives–making people healthier, wealthier, and safer. I'm proud to be one of them.

Phil Radford,
President and CEO
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Building a Better World, Together ›

Join with us to make a safer, fairer, healthier marketplace

Making Food Safer

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Red Dye No. 3 has been shown to cause cancer in animals and has been linked to hyperactivity and other behavioral effects in children. The Food and Drug Administration even banned the use of the artificial colorant in cosmetics in 1990, after evidence of its potential harms mounted.

Yet Red Dye No. 3 is still allowed to be used in food. Experts are especially troubled by this because so many products containing the substance—candy, baked goods, fruit juice, hot dogs, and more—are marketed to children, who are particularly vulnerable to developmental harm.

WHAT CR IS DOING ABOUT IT

In 2022, CR joined a petition calling on the FDA to ban Red Dye No. 3 in food. In October 2024 we delivered another petition to the agency, signed by some 80,000 consumers, urging the same. And we co-sponsored a 2023 California law that—starting Jan. 1, 2027—bans the use of Red Dye 3 and three other dangerous food additives in the state.

In January, the FDA announced a federal ban. Food manufacturers have until Jan. 15, 2027, to reformulate their products nationwide.

CR's food safety experts say this move is a step in the right direction—and are now urging the FDA to do more to limit the use of the other common food ingredients, including artificial food dyes, that have been linked to health problems.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Please support these efforts by signing our petition urging the FDA to remove all artificial food dyes from our food, at **CR.org/dyepetition**. Meanwhile, the best way to avoid these and other chemicals is to read the ingredients lists of the foods you eat. If they're in the food, they will usually be listed there.

CALL TO ACTION

Many Americans don't realize that if they own a car made in the past five years, it is likely collecting data about their driving habits, such as how fast they accelerate and take turns—intel that insurance companies can use to raise their rates. In fact, General Motors recently settled claims by the Federal Trade Commission that it was sharing such driving data without consumers' permission. And a new investigation by CR indicates that nearly every automaker selling cars in the U.S. is doing the same thing, even after the GM settlement. Join us in calling on automakers to stop sharing your driving info with data brokers, by signing our petition at **CR.org/autodata**.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT CHASE

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NATURAL CURES
Melatonin for better sleep. Zinc for a cold. Acupuncture for back pain. Here's what really works—and what doesn't.

Our January/February 2025 article **"Save $500 on Cell Phone Service This Year"** offered ways to get a better deal from your provider or make the switch to a less expensive plan. Readers shared their thoughts about that story and others in the issue. Read our responses here.

WE USED TO BE CUSTOMERS of Consumer Cellular and were very satisfied with the service. We are in our 80s and were advised to get smartwatches because of the fall-alert feature and other health-alert and tracking features. Unfortunately, Consumer Cellular cannot support Apple watches, so we had to switch to another provider—forced to pay more with poorer customer service. It might have been nice to note this in the article, as these health features make the Apple Watch very popular with us old folks.
–S. Gansser, Southlake, TX

EDITOR'S NOTE *We're sorry to hear that you had to switch from a provider that was otherwise working well for you. It might be worth giving Consumer Cellular another call to clarify your situation. When we checked, it appeared that it did support cellular connectivity for the Apple Watch Series 4 and newer versions for an additional $5 per month per smartwatch. This allows you to send texts or make calls from your watch without having your phone nearby. It's also worth mentioning that Apple Watch's Fall Detection can work without cellular service as long as your phone is connected to WiFi or there's satellite coverage.*

I CERTAINLY SAVE MONEY using Mint Mobile. However, when I traveled overseas, callers would hear "this number is not in service," or calls would go directly to voicemail. Some text messages came through but others did not. Using Mint Mobile outside of the U.S. isn't ideal unless you pay for their worldwide service.
–Abdul Nasser, Downey, CA

EDITOR'S NOTE *This is a great point, and it's something that frequent travelers should consider when switching providers. Currently, Mint charges $20 for 10 days of international roaming–available in most countries–which includes unlimited data, 500 texts, and 500 minutes of calling. Depending on how often you travel, the cost of international service with Mint Mobile may negate your overall savings. You also have to activate international service when you arrive, which may explain the "not in service" messages.*

WRITE

Go to **CR.org/lettertoeditor** to share your comments for publication.

SUPPLEMENT SAFETY

YOUR ARTICLE "Is Cinnamon Safe to Eat?" made me think about the cinnamon supplements I take for heart health. Have you run tests on those products?
–Bill Kozar, Columbus, IN

EDITOR'S NOTE *We haven't tested cinnamon supplements, but based on the results of our cinnamon testing, we suggest using caution with them. A common daily dose on cinnamon supplement labels is 1,000 mg, which is about half a teaspoon. More than half of the 36 cinnamon powders we tested had problematic lead levels at that daily dosage.*

BACK PAIN TREATMENTS

IN "NATURAL CURES: Which Ones Work (and Which Don't)," the section on spinal manipulation for back pain does not mention osteopathic manipulative therapy. Osteopaths (DOs), who are fully licensed physicians, may specialize

in this therapy and limit their practice to such. It would be a disservice to your readers not to mention this.
–Joseph Haydu Jr., Woodstock, VA

EDITOR'S NOTE *Osteopathic manipulative treatment (OMT) uses pressure and resistance to move muscles and joints with the goal of diagnosing, treating, and preventing musculoskeletal problems. It's done by DOs or MDs trained in it, and American Osteopathic Association guidelines recommend the treatment for low back pain. Research suggests that it's safe and that there's evidence it can help with chronic back pain, but proof of its effectiveness for other kinds of chronic pain is limited. Medicare does cover OMT when it's deemed medically necessary.*

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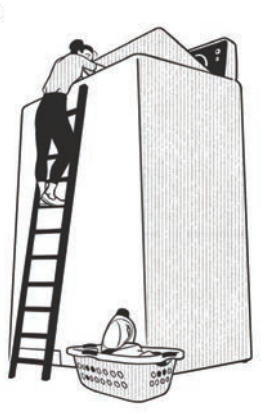
FLUORIDE DECISIONS

"YOUR HEALTHY TEETH Toolkit" didn't mention the use of fluoride varnish. I know it is recommended for children. However, I was hoping to read what the experts recommend for adults. Sometimes I say yes to the application, sometimes no—and most insurance companies don't cover it.
–Laurel Tierney, Spokane Valley, WA

EDITOR'S NOTE *There's not a lot of evidence that fluoride treatments for adults are effective, but they may be beneficial if you're already at risk for cavities. A study from 2022 analyzed dental records of veterans and found that those at high risk for cavities who received a fluoride treatment had a lower risk of getting them. The American Dental Association says the routine use of fluoride gels or varnishes may be beneficial for those at high risk for cavities, such as people who drink unfluoridated well water and those who don't use toothpaste containing fluoride.*

DEALING WITH DUD PRODUCTS

IN "WHAT TO DO If You Buy a Dud," you didn't mention purchasing an extended warranty. At Lowe's, I bought one for a refrigerator. After two service calls, Lowe's sent me a store credit card for the purchase price, and the fridge lasted several more years without maintenance—pretty fair I think.
–William Liggett, Honolulu



TOO-TALL WASHING MACHINES

One detail not mentioned in "CR's Ultimate Guide to Laundry": New top-load washers are taller than older models, making them all but impossible for someone like me—at 5 feet tall—to reach into. Short buyers beware!
—Sharon Rosen, Phoenix

EDITOR'S NOTE
You're right: Top loaders are now between 42 and 46 inches tall (including the control panel), and some can be difficult for shorter people to use. If you're in the market for a new model, we suggest heading to a store so that you can see it in person. One option is the top-rated LG WT8405CW for $1,035. At 43 inches tall, it's one of the lowest-profile top-load agitators in our ratings.

EDITOR'S NOTE *We didn't mention buying an extended warranty because our research suggests that it usually isn't worthwhile (though we're happy it worked out for you in this case). In a 2022 survey of Consumer Reports members, about half of the extended warranties that had run the full length of their contract were never used for any reason.*

I'M NOT SURE IF I should share my secret method for getting results [from companies], but here goes: I write a detailed snail mail letter (including supporting documents) to the CEO. In my experience, CEOs have an "executive" team that responds promptly. Most of the letters I've sent have resulted in full refunds or other positive outcomes. One manufacturer not only refunded 100 percent of our purchase price for a double oven but also didn't even want it back. We're donating it to Habitat for Humanity.
–Jon Merritt, Los Angeles

TIRE COST CORRECTION

IN "TIRES THAT LAST the Longest," your math for a tire's cost per mile needs review. $254 divided by 95,000 projected miles of tire life would equal $0.00267 per mile, or 26.7 cents per 100 miles, not "26.7 cents per mile."
–Joel Maycock, Greensboro, NC

EDITOR'S NOTE *You're correct: The cost estimates in the article are per 100 miles, not per mile. We've updated the online version of the article accordingly. You can see it at* **CR.org/tiresthatlast**.

ILLUSTRATION BY JASON SCHNEIDER

What We're Testing in Our Labs ...

In our 63 labs, we continually review and rate products. Here, timely picks for this month.

Self-Propelled Lawn Mowers

WE TESTED: 65 models
WE TEST FOR: Ease of handling (pushing, pulling, and turning the mower). On battery mowers we also assess how much grass can be cut on a full charge, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 73
Range: 55-88

BEST BATTERY-POWERED
Greenworks MO80L421
$800

88 OVERALL SCORE

FAST MOWING & CHARGING
Ryobi RYPM8010
$2,000

85 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT GAS MODEL, BUT NOISY
Craftsman M320
$480

74 OVERALL SCORE

Garbage Disposals

WE TESTED: 42 continuous-feed models
WE TEST FOR: How quickly and finely a model grinds beef bones and vegetable scraps; how noisy it is during use, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 47
Range: 17-81

SPEEDY & POWERFUL (1¼ HP)
Frigidaire FF13DISPC1
$175

81 OVERALL SCORE

GRINDS VERY FINELY (1 HP)
GE GFC1020N
$250

78 OVERALL SCORE

QUIETER OPERATION (1 HP)
Moen EX Series EXL100C
$290

75 OVERALL SCORE

Ask Our Experts

Are there any foods that I shouldn't put in my garbage disposal?

YES. DISPOSALS WITH POWERFUL MOTORS of ¾ hp or more, like the three models above, should be able to grind everything from corn cobs to peach pits–and even small bones. But all disposals struggle with thin, fibrous vegetables, such as celery, corn husks, artichokes, and asparagus, as well as big clumps of vegetable peels. Instead of getting pulverized by the disposal, these small pieces can ball up, causing clogs. Large amounts of starchy foods, like leftover rice, can also gum up the works. Some experts caution not to feed your disposal eggshells, shellfish, or coffee grounds, either. These are slow to decompose and can accumulate in your pipes over time.

ILLUSTRATION: JOSEPH CARRINGTON

WORSE – BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE

For the latest ratings of these and other product categories, readers with a Digital or All Access membership can go to **CR.org.**

Smart Thermostats

WE TESTED: 47 models
WE TEST FOR: Smart features, including those that sense when you're home and adjust to your daily routine; ease of controls; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 49
Range: 24-91

BEST OVERALL
Ecobee Smart Thermostat Premium EB-STATE6-01
$250

91 OVERALL SCORE

CONVENIENT FEATURES
Google Nest Learning Thermostat (4th Gen)
$280

86 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE
Honeywell Home T9 RCHT9510WF
$170

73 OVERALL SCORE

Bathroom Scales

WE TESTED: 45 models
WE TEST FOR: A scale's accuracy no matter where the user stands on it. We also evaluate the range of features a smart scale offers.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 83
Range: 24-93

TOP DIGITAL PICK
Renpho R-MSD02
$35

93 OVERALL SCORE

EASY-TO-USE SMART FEATURES
Wyze Scale S
$24

91 OVERALL SCORE

DIGITAL BARGAIN BUY
iHome 321IDSWM1BL
$10

89 OVERALL SCORE

Electric Bikes

WE TESTED: 61 models
WE TEST FOR: The distance a bike can cover on a single charge; how well the bike accelerates, brakes, and climbs hills; how responsive the controls are; and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 68
Range: 35-92

LONG RANGE ON ONE CHARGE
Heybike Cityrun
$1,300

92 OVERALL SCORE

LIGHTER WEIGHT
Aventon Pace 500.3 ST
$1,600

84 OVERALL SCORE

FOLDS FOR EASY STORAGE
Lectric XP 3.0 Folding
$1,000

76 OVERALL SCORE

Large Dehumidifiers

WE TESTED: 28 models
WE TEST FOR: How many pints of water are removed from the air in humid conditions in a day, how accurate the humidistat is, how loud the model is, and more.

ABOUT THE SCORES:
Median: 54
Range: 28-83

EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT
Honeywell TP70WKN
$300

83 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD VALUE
Midea MAD50PS1AWBL
$240

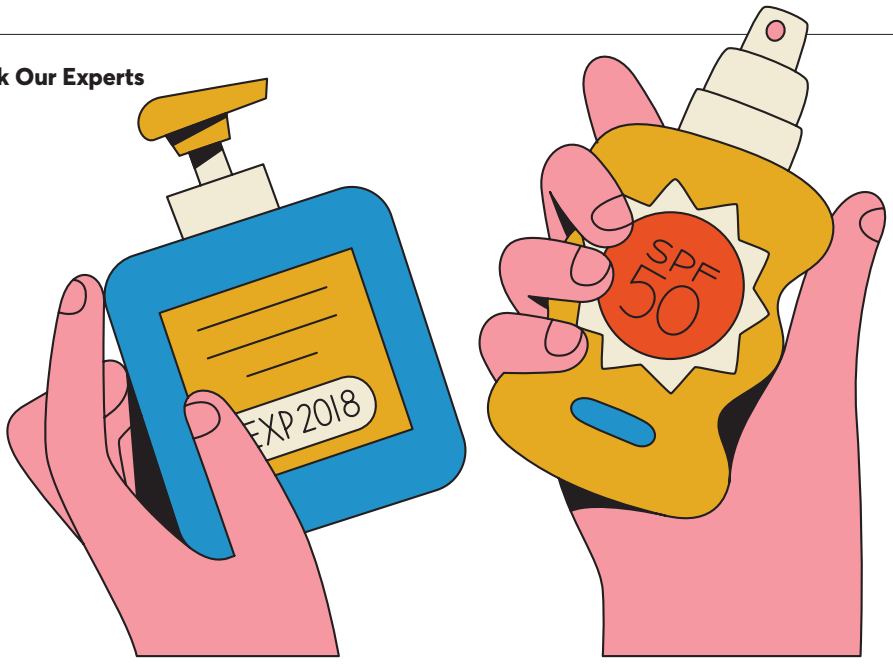
69 OVERALL SCORE

QUIET, WITH A BUILT-IN PUMP
TCL W50D9P2
$265

61 OVERALL SCORE

Note: *We rate different products according to different testing protocols; as a result, Overall Scores of one product category are not comparable with another.*

COMING NEXT MONTH Car Seats & More



Does sunscreen really expire?

YES, SUNSCREEN DOES EXPIRE—typically about three years after purchase, assuming it's stored properly. It's important to check because old or degraded sunscreen may not adequately protect you from the sun's harmful rays, increasing your risk of sunburn, skin damage, and even skin cancer.

There are a few ways to find out if your sunscreen is still good. Start by looking for an expiration date. (The Food and Drug Administration doesn't require manufacturers to include this, but many do anyway.) It's usually embossed near the crimped end of a tube or printed on the bottom or side of a bottle or can. If the date has passed, throw out the sunscreen.

If the expiration date is coming up soon, it's too faded to read, or you can't find a date at all, test the sunscreen by applying some to your hand. If the lotion has separated, looks watery, dry, or flaky, has changed in color, or has an unpleasant smell, it's time to toss it. Also note where it was stored, because sunscreen breaks down faster when exposed to heat and sunlight. So a bottle kept in your bathroom cabinet should be okay, but one left in a hot car or beach bag, or near a sunny window, may deteriorate faster. If you think your sunscreen has been exposed to high temperatures for a long period, it's safer to replace it.

Next time you buy sunscreen, pay attention to the expiration date so you don't grab one that's been sitting on a store shelf for a long time. If it doesn't have a date, use a permanent marker to write when you purchased it on the container so you can track how long you've had it. Then store it in a cool spot.

LEARN

We have more than 140 in-house experts who research, test, and compare. Submit your questions at **CR.org/askourexperts** … and watch for the answers.

What type of oil should I put in my car?

YOU PROBABLY KNOW that you have three main choices when it comes to oil: conventional refined crude oil, synthetic, or a blend of the two. Which one you choose depends on your car model and the conditions you drive in. First, check the owner's manual to see what oil and viscosity your automaker recommends. Synthetic oil used to be something only performance cars needed. But these days it's more common for mainstream vehicles, such as the Subaru Forester and Toyota Camry.

That's because there are many advantages to synthetic oil. For example, it flows better in extreme conditions like hot and cold, enabling it to protect the engine better. "Synthetic oil also lasts longer—up to 10,000 miles or more," says John Ibbotson, CR's chief mechanic. "It costs about 30 percent more than conventional oil, but you'll offset that extra cost by replacing it half as often."

If the manual recommends conventional oil or a blend, you could still consider upgrading to fully synthetic if you live in a place with extreme temperatures, you use your car for towing, or you drive infrequently—all of which can degrade conventional oil more quickly. No matter which type you use, check your oil level monthly. Driving with low oil can cause engine damage.

Should I cover my laptop camera when it's not in use?

YOU'D BE HARD-PRESSED to find a laptop that doesn't have a built-in webcam nowadays. While that makes it easier to hop on a Zoom call or FaceTime, you might worry about leaving that camera uncovered all the time. According to Steve Blair, CR's lead privacy and security researcher, it's possible for webcams to be hacked and made to record audio and/or video without your knowledge. The odds of that happening to an everyday consumer (as opposed to a high-profile target like an activist or government worker) are probably low. But if you're concerned, you can cover the camera with a bit of tape when it's not in use. You can also buy stick-on laptop camera covers that slide shut. Some laptops, such as the Lenovo ThinkPad and the MSI Prestige, have built-in privacy covers for their webcams. (Our full ratings, at **CR.org/laptops**, note when a model has one.)

Even if the camera is covered, the built-in mic could still pick up audio. So you also might want to switch the default microphone to a different device, like a USB headset or an external microphone, that you can disconnect or turn off. You can change this in your system settings.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSEPH CARRINGTON

IN THE KNOW

Healthy & Tasty Treats

Craving something cold and sweet? We have good news: Enjoying the occasional frosty dessert doesn't need to be a guilty pleasure. We reviewed the nutrition info on more than 40 popular supermarket products and found good options with 4 grams or less of saturated fat, 11 grams or less of added sugar, less additives, and no sugar substitutes (some research suggests that they may pose health risks). Then we tasted all the healthier choices. Here are the delicious winners.

FLAVORFUL FRUIT POP

Chloe's Mango Fruit Pops $1.50 per bar

This bar tasted like fresh fruit—maybe because it contains real mango purée, not just fruit juice like some others we've seen.

CALORIES **60**
ADDED SUGARS **11 g**
SATURATED FAT **0 g**

RICH & FUDGY BAR

Good Pop Dairy Free Chocolate Fudge Bars $1.75 per bar

Made with coconut milk, this treat is icy at first bite but gets creamier as you keep eating. Its dark chocolate flavor has a hint of coconut.

CALORIES **90**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
SATURATED FAT **4 g**

SATISFYING SANDWICH

Alden's Organic Mini Squares Vanilla Ice Cream Sandwich $1.50 per square

Our testers liked the combo of natural vanilla flavor and tender chocolate wafers in this one.

CALORIES **100**
ADDED SUGARS **7 g**
SATURATED FAT **2.5 g**

VERY BERRY FROZEN YOGURT

365 Whole Foods Market Organic Blueberry Greek Yogurt Low Fat Dessert Bars $1.38 per bar

This pleasingly smooth froyo bar tastes like blueberry jam mixed with cream.

CALORIES **80**
ADDED SUGARS **9 g**
SATURATED FAT **0.5 g**

PHOTO: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (FROZEN TREATS). PHOTOS: SCOTT MEADOWS/CONSUMER REPORTS (PACKAGING)

HEALTH UPDATE

How to Prevent Ear Problems

Earaches aren't just uncomfortable—if left untreated, they can lead to hearing loss. Use these self-care strategies to protect your ears.

Skip the Cotton Swabs

"Using a Q-tip to clean inside the ear can damage the ear canal and push wax deeper inside," says Joshua Zeiger, MD, otolaryngologist at the Mount Sinai Health System in New York City. Bits of the cotton swab could also end up inside the canal, which could irritate or injure your ears. If you notice excessive earwax—which can cause a feeling of uncomfortable fullness, itching, and pain, and eventual hearing loss—see your healthcare provider. A doctor may recommend wax-softening agents or professional earwax removal.

Clean In-Ear Devices

Earbuds, hearing aids, and earplugs can all introduce bacteria into the ear canal, which can cause an outer ear infection. To clean in-ear headphone buds, pop off any silicone tips and wipe them with a lint-free cloth dampened with plain water. Use a dry cotton swab to remove earwax and dust from the bud itself. (Never get water on the speakers, openings, charging contacts, or port.) To de-gunk hard-to-reach crevices, try the pointed end of a dental floss stick. But be gentle: Digging or pushing too hard could cause damage. A piece of tape or putty can also safely pull out grime. Make sure the tips are dry before you reattach them.

Be Careful With Water

Spending time in a pool, a hot tub, a shower, or the ocean can lead to so-called swimmer's ear. Triggered by contaminated water trapped in the ear canal, symptoms include itchiness inside the ear, redness or swelling, pain that gets worse if the ear is tugged or pressed on, and pus that drains from the ear. It's typically treated with antibiotic ear drops. To prevent this problem, use a swim cap or earplugs to block water from getting in. If you feel water in one of your ears, tilt your head downward and pull the ear in different directions to coax the moisture out. Over-the-counter ear drops can also help dry ears. Ask your doctor to recommend a brand.

ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI. PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (2)

CR Time Traveler FOOD SAFETY

1939 CR reports on botulism in improperly sterilized jars and cans. We advise avoiding food from swollen tin cans, or any preserved products that smell of rancid butter.

1944 We warn readers to take extra care in summer, when high temperatures promote rapid growth of bacteria. Food at a picnic, for example, can breed staphylococcus germs.

1955 To avoid food poisoning while traveling abroad, we say to skip delicacies like custard-filled pastries, cold egg mixtures, and some meats in places where sanitation and refrigeration may be poor.

1960 The FDA warns Americans to avoid cranberry products, due to contamination with a potentially cancer-causing weed killer. CR applauds the agency's action.

1972 Our tests of 41 frozen pizzas reveal shockingly high counts of enterococci, a hardy bacteria that can survive freezing.

AUTO UPDATE

Secrets to Getting More MPG

Gas prices tend to rise in the spring and summer months. Our fuel-saving strategies can help stretch your dollar.

Check your tire pressure. Tires lose about 1 pound per square inch a month. That drop in pressure puts more of the tire's surface in contact with the road, making your car's engine work harder—and use more gas—to move the vehicle. The recommended pressure for cold tires is listed on the driver's doorjamb sticker. Check and adjust pressure monthly.

Don't speed. We measured gas mileage while driving at a steady 55, 65, and 75 mph in a Nissan Altima and a Toyota RAV4. We found that driving at 75 mph instead of 55 mph can lower fuel economy by about 13 to 14 mpg. That's like going from the mileage of a compact car to a large SUV—an expensive decision.

Watch your pace. Once you get up to speed, maintain a steady pace. Fast acceleration requires more fuel, and unnecessary braking wastes the fuel you used to go faster. In our tests, frequent bursts of acceleration and braking reduced an older Toyota Camry's mileage by 2 to 3 mpg. Driving smoothly can also extend the life of the engine, transmission, brakes, and tires.

Opt for regular over premium octane. You can save money by skipping premium gas—as long as your car's manufacturer doesn't say it's "required." Check your fuel filler door. If it says "recommended," using premium gas is optional. Switching to regular could save you 84 cents per gallon.

Buy good-quality gas. Regardless of the octane you use, we recommend filling up with Top Tier gas, which has more detergent additives than standard gas. That detergent can help protect your car's engine from carbon buildup and deposits that may reduce fuel economy. If you've been using standard gas, switching to Top Tier now will start to clear away deposits that have accumulated. Many gas station brands, including Chevron, Costco Kirkland Signature Gasoline, Exxon, Mobil, and Shell, sell Top Tier gas. But some familiar names, like 7-Eleven, don't. Look for the Top Tier logo before you fill up. When a retailer has Top Tier fuel, all of the octanes from regular to premium are Top Tier.

Optimize your AC. Before cranking the air conditioning, open all the windows for 20 seconds. The outer air will cool the cabin so that the AC won't need to use as much gas.

Map out the best deal. To save money on the gas itself, try apps like GasBuddy, which map gas prices. Generally, gas stations well off major highways have lower prices, as do warehouse stores like Costco.

ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS (4); SHUTTERSTOCK (2)

1983 Why is it okay to eat blue cheese but not other cheese mold? We explain that only some types of mold are bad for you and how to spot them (furry spots on soft cheeses, white spots on rinds).

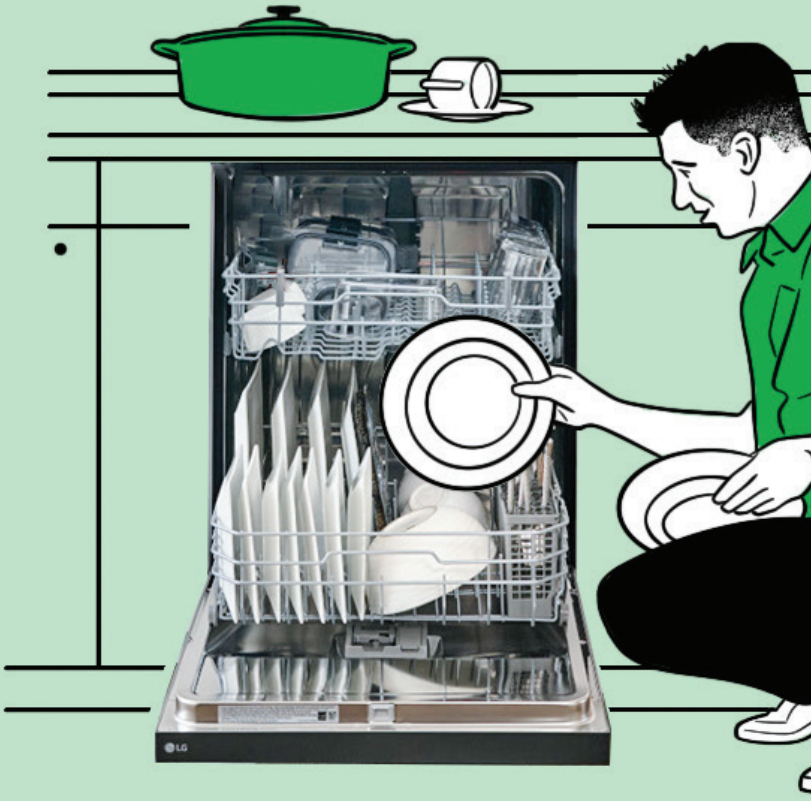
1997 After the largest recall of beef in U.S. history—25 million pounds of contaminated hamburger patties—CR offers ways to lower the risks of foodborne illness.

2010 We test store-bought whole chickens and find that two-thirds harbor salmonella and campylobacter, responsible for infecting 3.4 million Americans each year.

2015 CR tests 500 pounds of frozen shrimp and finds they contain E. coli and listeria, which can cause serious illness or death. We call on the FDA to step up inspections.

2025 To prevent food-borne illness at home, we say to clean your kitchen sponges daily by wetting them, then microwaving them on high for 1 minute.

To learn more about how to protect yourself from foodborne illnesses, turn to page 28.



PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT

Dishwasher Deals

Better cleaning, shorter cycles, improved water and energy efficiency: Today's high-tech dishwashers do it all. But they've also gotten pretty pricey. Most models in our ratings cost over $1,000, with some coming close to $2,500. The good news is that you don't need to spend that much to get a great machine. Our experts have curated a list of top-performing dishwashers, all priced at $850 or less. The Ikea model below, for example, offers excellent cleaning performance at $350.

Spending less doesn't mean sacrificing convenience, either. Nearly all of the money savers shown here have digital displays, ample flatware slots, and adjustable racks. Some also feature self-cleaning filters (the Ikea) and WiFi connectivity (the top-rated LG ADFD5448AT, the Midea MDT24P5AST, and the Bosch below).

78 OVERALL SCORE

LG ADFD5448AT
$800

- 5/5 WASHING
- 4/5 DRYING
- 4/5 ENERGY USE
- 4/5 NOISE

77 OVERALL SCORE

LG LDFC353LS
$830

- 5/5 WASHING
- 3/5 DRYING
- 5/5 ENERGY USE
- 3/5 NOISE

77 OVERALL SCORE

Ikea Essentiell 804.655.85
$350

- 5/5 WASHING
- 4/5 DRYING
- 4/5 ENERGY USE
- 3/5 NOISE

76 OVERALL SCORE

LG LDFC2423V
$700

- 5/5 WASHING
- 3/5 DRYING
- 5/5 ENERGY USE
- 4/5 NOISE

76 OVERALL SCORE

LG LDPN454HT (Home Depot)
$850

- 5/5 WASHING
- 3/5 DRYING
- 5/5 ENERGY USE
- 4/5 NOISE

75 OVERALL SCORE

Midea MDT24P5AST
$800

- 4/5 WASHING
- 4/5 DRYING
- 4/5 ENERGY USE
- 3/5 NOISE

74 OVERALL SCORE

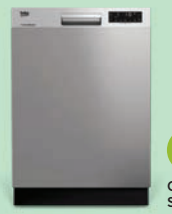
Whirlpool WDP730HAMZ
$790

- 4/5 WASHING
- 5/5 DRYING
- 5/5 ENERGY USE
- 3/5 NOISE

74 OVERALL SCORE

Bosch 300 Series SHE41CM5N
$750

- 4/5 WASHING
- 2/5 DRYING
- 5/5 ENERGY USE
- 3/5 NOISE



73 OVERALL SCORE

Beko DUT25401X
$740

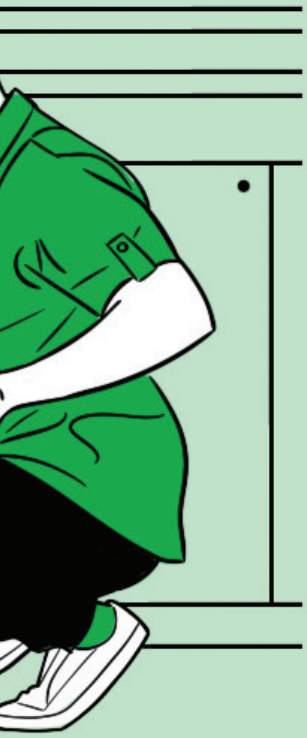
- 4/5 WASHING
- 4/5 DRYING
- 5/5 ENERGY USE
- 3/5 NOISE

71 OVERALL SCORE

Frigidaire GDSH4715AF
$750

- 5/5 WASHING
- 5/5 DRYING
- 4/5 ENERGY USE
- 4/5 NOISE

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY | CR GREEN CHOICE



75
OVERALL SCORE

Midea MDF24P2BWW (Lowe's) $480

- 4/5 WASHING
- 5/5 DRYING
- 4/5 ENERGY USE
- 2/5 NOISE

71
OVERALL SCORE

Insignia NS-DWR3SS1 $500

- 4/5 WASHING
- 5/5 DRYING
- 5/5 ENERGY USE
- 4/5 NOISE

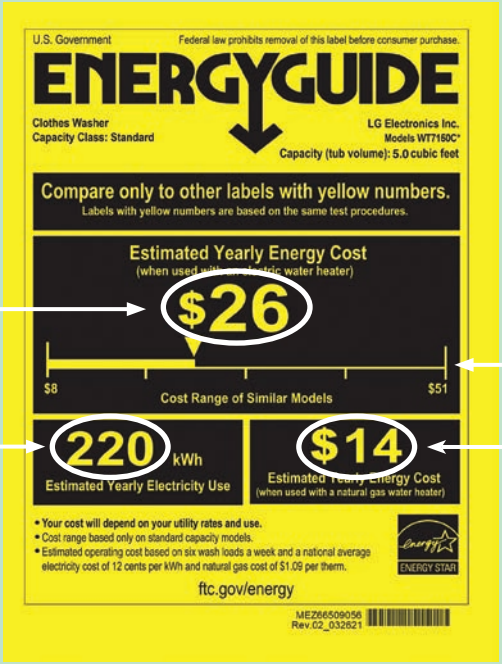
ILLUSTRATION: JASON SCHNEIDER. GRAPHIC: FTC.GOV (ENERGYGUIDE). PHOTOS: CONSUMER REPORTS; MANUFACTURERS (DISHWASHERS)

MONEY SAVER

Decoding Energy Labels

When shopping for a large appliance, it's natural to focus on the purchase price. But another important factor is how much the machine will add to your utility bills. Reading the EnergyGuide label closely could save you hundreds of dollars. Here's what to look for.

ESTIMATED YEARLY ENERGY COST
This is the approximate amount you'll pay for the model over one year. It takes into account both the amount of energy required to operate the appliance and to heat water, if that's required.


U.S. Government
Federal law prohibits removal of this label before consumer purchase.
ENERGYGUIDE
Clothes Washer
Capacity Class: Standard
LG Electronics Inc.
Models WT7150C*
Capacity (tub volume): 5.0 cubic feet
Compare only to other labels with yellow numbers.
Labels with yellow numbers are based on the same test procedures.
Estimated Yearly Energy Cost
$26
$8
Cost Range of Similar Models
$51
220 kWh
Estimated Yearly Electricity Use
$14
Estimated Yearly Energy Cost
(when used with a natural gas water heater)
• Your cost will depend on your utility rates and use.
• Cost range based only on standard capacity models.
• Estimated operating cost based on six wash loads a week and a national average electricity cost of 12 cents per kWh and natural gas cost of $1.09 per therm.
ENERGY STAR
ftc.gov/energy
MEZ66509056
Rev.02_032621

COST RANGE OF SIMILAR MODELS
This scale helps you compare the model you're considering to others of the same type. The closer the arrow is to the left, the more energy-efficient (and cost-efficient) the appliance is.

ESTIMATED YEARLY ELECTRICITY USE
This shows how much energy in kilowatt-hours (kWh) the appliance uses in one year. For a washing machine, for example, this estimate is based on the average energy used per wash cycle multiplied by the number of cycles run per year. The label uses national averages—but electricity rates vary by location, so also look at the bulleted information below it to help you estimate your actual costs.

ESTIMATED YEARLY ENERGY COST
If you have a natural gas appliance, refer to this number.

BE SURE TO READ THE FINE PRINT

The bullet points at the bottom of the label detail what the estimates are based on. For a dishwasher, for example, it shows the number of loads per week and the utility prices the Department of Energy used in its estimates. They are based on national averages (last updated in 2022) and may not reflect your actual usage or rates. For a more accurate estimate, use the appliance energy calculator at energy.gov.

Energy Star certification is optional, so you won't see it on every label—but when you do, it's worth noting. It means the manufacturer has adhered to strict energy-efficiency criteria set by the government and, in some cases, also demonstrated that there is no trade-off in performance to save energy. Choosing an Energy Star model will often save you money over a model without this distinction.

Shopping online? EnergyGuide labels aren't always easy to spot online. You may need to click a link or download a file to get to it.

TECH UPDATE

Take Great Photos With Your Phone

The latest smartphones have multiple high-resolution cameras built in, but if you aren't using the right settings and features, you may still end up with blurry pictures. Use these helpful tools to make every shot better.

TIP

Get Sharper Images

If you just point and shoot, your phone's camera automatically picks a focus point, which may leave your intended subject out of focus and too dark or light. To control this, tap on your subject on the screen before you click the shutter button. This ensures that the focus is set to your intended target. (On an iPhone, a yellow box will pop up to confirm focus.) For multiple shots of the same subject, press your finger down until "AE/AF Lock" appears on your screen. This locks focus and exposure, preventing shifts between photos.

TIP

Fix Imperfections

Make a good photo even better by removing unwanted elements, like a nearby trash can. Some newer smartphones have AI tools to remove distractions. On Samsung phones, look for the Object Eraser tool. On the latest iPhones, use Clean Up. To remove something, zoom in, trace around the object, and let the tool fill in the area you've erased to match the background. Results aren't always perfect, so if the edit doesn't look quite right, undo it and try again.

TIP

Improve the Composition

For the most visually compelling shots, experts say not to center your subject. Instead, hold the camera so that the person or animal you're photographing is off to one side, in the outer third of the frame. Similarly, when capturing a landscape, avoid putting the horizon in the exact middle. To make it easier to line things up, you can overlay a three-by-three grid on the camera display. To turn on the grid on an iPhone, go to Settings → Camera → Composition, and toggle on "Grid." On a Samsung Galaxy phone, turn on "Grid lines" under the camera app's settings. Then align key elements along the grid's lines—for example, placing the horizon along the top third (as shown at left) instead of splitting the photo in two.

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK (3)

Turn to page 56 to learn more about high-quality smartphone cameras we've tested.

COUNTERTOP INTELLIGENCE

5 Clever Kitchen Tools

These gadgets can save you time and effort—and they're easy on your hands, too.

PHOTO: BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

SPEEDY DICING

Oxo Vegetable Chopper
$23

This push-to-dice chopper takes most of the work out of prepping veggies. It's small but feels substantial, and doesn't slide around on your countertop while you're using it (unlike some others we tried). We like the angled design, too—it increases your leverage as you press the chopper down, making it easier to cut up hard items like onions. The diced vegetables stay in the bottom of the container, which keeps your prep area neat—and all parts are dishwasher-safe.

HELP WITH TIGHT LIDS

Tenura Silicone Jar Opener
$9

Tired of struggling to open stubborn jars? Give your hands and wrists a break with this simple dome-shaped tool. Just place it over the problem lid and the tool's ridged surface will give you the extra grip you need to twist off that too-tight top. It also comes in a smaller size for opening twist-off bottle tops. Tenura says its jar openers are nontoxic and dishwasher-safe.

SAFER GRATING

Zyliss Classic Rotary Handheld Cheese Grater
$23

If you've ever nicked your hand on a box grater, you'll get the appeal of this rotary tool, which keeps your fingers far away from serrated edges. With a sturdy grip that's made for both right- and left-handed users, this lightweight grater is comfortable to hold. Place a small block of cheese in the compartment, grip the handle, and spin the crank. It easily shaved down hard cheeses in our evaluations, turning 4 ounces of Parmesan into a fluffy pile in under a minute.

NO-TWIST GRINDING

Sweet Alice Gravity Electric Pepper & Salt Mill Grinder Set
$30

These electric grinders do all the work for you: The mills automatically start when you invert them—no twisting required. They produce evenly ground salt and pepper, and have some other handy features, like a soft blue LED light that illuminates the food you're seasoning and clear bottoms so that you can see when it's time to refill (which is easy to do). We reviewed the battery-powered set, but a rechargeable USB version is also available.

EASIER OPENING

Kitchen Mama Auto Electric Can Opener
$30

This is the best automatic can opener we've tried. Place the tool on top of a can and press the center button, and it will cut in a circle—without your guidance—until you press the button again to stop it. When you lift up the opener, the magnetized bottom will take the lid off with it. The Kitchen Mama provided a consistently smooth-edge cut in our trials—a nice safety perk. We also liked that it's small enough to fit easily into a kitchen drawer.

CR DEAL FINDER

Outdoor Discounts

Spend less on some of our favorite products.

PATIO PAL

Permasteel 80-qt. Classic $200

This cooler has plenty of room—it can fit 110 12-ounce cans—and a fun retro look. In our tests, it did a great job of keeping its contents cold: After 26 hours, there was still unmelted ice inside. One caveat: The wheels were noisy when we rolled it around.

CR SAVINGS

15% OFF

USE CODE **CRSTEEL15**
AT PERMASTEEL.LIFE*

86 OVERALL SCORE

YARD CARE HELP

Worx WG185 (left) $270

Worx WG186 (right) $300

Both of these tools excelled in our performance tests. They trimmed grass neatly, edged walkways quickly, and cut weeds well. They're also easy to handle, comfortable to hold, and quiet. Worx string trimmers earn high marks for predicted reliability in our member surveys, too.

CR SAVINGS

20% OFF

USE CODE **CRWORX20**
AT WORX.COM

86 OVERALL SCORE

GO-ANYWHERE FAN

JisuLife Life3 Portable Neck Fan $46

When you wear this personal fan around your neck, it directs a breeze up toward your face so that you can stay cool on the go. Our staffers found it comfortable to wear and cooling on long, hot outdoor walks. It's quieter than similar styles of neck fans we tried, and it feels sturdy.

CR SAVINGS

20% OFF

USE CODE **CRJisu20**
AT JISULIFE.COM

EASY GRILL

Ninja Woodfire Outdoor Grill & Smoker OG701DTC $370

This portable multitasker can work as a grill, a smoker, and even an air fryer. CR editor and trained chef Paul Hope cooked asparagus, steak, chicken, and shrimp on it. "It's hands down the best electric grill I've used," he says. In the air fryer, chicken wings and fries came out evenly cooked and crispy.

CR SAVINGS

$60 OFF

USE CODE **CRNinjaGrill60**
AT NINJAKITCHEN.COM/
CONSUMER-REPORTS

96 OVERALL SCORE **95** OVERALL SCORE

BYE-BYE, BUGS!

Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wipes (left) $7

Ben's Tick & Insect Repellent Wilderness Formula Pump (right) $7

These are the top mosquito and tick repellents in our ratings. Both excel at protecting against Aedes mosquitoes (the aggressive ones that usually bite in the day and at dusk) and Culex mosquitoes (which mostly bite at night).

CR SAVINGS

20% OFF

USE CODE **CRBENS**
VALID ON ALL REPELLENTS
AT BENS30.COM

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS

Note: All discounts are valid from April 16, 2025, through May 19, 2025. Offers do not stack with other discounts. One use per customer. *Code for Permasteel cooler is valid on all colors of classic PS-203 models. Sale items not valid.

WORSE — BETTER

RECALLS

TO STAY INFORMED ABOUT RECALLS FOR YOUR VEHICLES, READERS WITH MEMBERSHIP CAN USE OUR FREE CAR RECALL TRACKER AT **CR.ORG/MORE**.

FORD EXPLORER & LINCOLN AVIATOR SUVs

Ford is recalling 240,510 2020-2021 Ford Explorer and Lincoln Aviator SUVs because they may have improperly secured seat belt buckle or seat belt retractor anchor bolts, which may not properly restrain an occupant during a crash. Owners may also notice noise—squeaking and rattling—if their vehicle has improperly secured anchor bolts.
What to do: Ford and Lincoln dealerships will inspect and, if necessary, replace any seat belt assemblies that weren't put together properly. NHTSA's campaign number is 25V093, and Ford's own number for this recall is 25S09. Owners may call Ford at 866-436-7332.

LG ELECTRIC RANGES

LG is recalling about 500,000 slide-in and freestanding electric ranges because the front-mounted knobs can be activated by accidental contact, posing a fire hazard. The ranges were sold at Best Buy, Costco, Home Depot, Lowe's, and other appliance stores nationwide, and online at lg.com, from 2015 through January 2025 for $1,400 to $2,650.
What to do: Call LG at 800-399-3265 or go to lgecares.com/rangerecall for a free warning label that reminds consumers to use the Lock Out/Control Lock function to disable activation of the heating elements when not in use. View an instructional video about this feature at vimeo.com/1037322282. Owners should keep children and pets away from the knobs. Check that the knobs are off and locked before leaving home or going to bed, and don't leave objects on the range when it's not in use.

CHARMAST POWER BANKS

Charmast is recalling about 488,000 power banks because the lithium-ion battery can overheat and ignite, posing fire and burn hazards. The power banks were sold at Amazon from December 2018 through September 2024 for $14 to $25.
What to do: Stop using the power bank. Go to charmast.com/pages/recall-info-page or call Charmast collect at 929-636-0293 for instructions on how to receive a full refund.

IGLOO ROLLING COOLERS

Igloo is recalling about 1,060,000 90-qt. Flip & Tow Rolling Coolers because the tow handle can pinch users' fingertips against the cooler, posing fingertip amputation and crushing hazards. The coolers were sold at Academy, Costco, Dick's, Target, and other stores nationwide, and online at Amazon, igloocoolers.com, and other websites, from January 2019 through January 2025 for $80 to $140.
What to do: Stop using the cooler. Contact Igloo at 888-943-5182 or go to igloocoolers.com for a free replacement handle.

GREATER GOODS KITCHEN SCALES

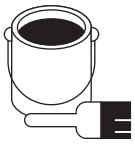
Greater Goods is recalling about 349,500 digital kitchen scales because the battery can easily be accessed by children, posing an ingestion hazard. This violates the federal regulations for consumer products containing button cell or coin batteries. In addition, a spare coin battery provided with the product is not in child-resistant packaging, as required by law. The scales also do not have the required warnings. When button cell or coin batteries are swallowed, they can cause serious injuries, internal chemical burns, and death. The scales were sold online at Amazon, Greater Goods, and Walmart from May 2023 through September 2024 for about $10.
What to do: Remove the battery from the scale and place it in an area that children cannot access. Call 866-991-0397 or go to greatergoods.com for information on how to receive a free kit, which includes a new replacement battery door, the required labeling, and an updated instruction manual.

THREE61 SAMURAI SMOKE ALARMS

Three61 is recalling about 328,000 Samurai Mini Smoke Alarms because the alarms can malfunction and fail to alert of a fire, posing a risk of smoke inhalation or death. The alarms were sold through HSN nationwide and online at hsn.com from July 2020 through November 2024 for $40 to $50.
What to do: Email Three61 at recall@samuraibrands.com for a free replacement alarm. To register, you must write "Recalled" with a permanent marker on the alarm and submit a photo to samuraibrands.com/recall. The company will then ship a replacement for free. Keep the smoke alarm installed until the replacement alarm is received.

MAY IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

EXTERIOR PAINTS



BLENDERS

JUNE IS THE BEST TIME TO BUY ...

INSECT REPELLENTS

STROLLERS

PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS. ICONS: RODRIGO DAMATI

PRODUCT UPDATE

THE LATEST RATINGS FROM OUR LABS

The Best Air Conditioners From Our Tests

Use our guide to learn about the newest types and find a great fit for any room.

by Allen St. John

The New Shape of Cool
U-shaped ACs, like the one above, have a wide slot into which you lower your window sash, making the unit quieter and more efficient.

WINDOW AIR conditioners have never been as highly valued as central AC systems. But several recent innovations have made many window air conditioners more effective at cooling your rooms, more energy-efficient, and quieter. And a handful of models even perform their cooling magic without obscuring the view from your windows.

That's why, in addition to conventional window units and portable models, CR testers evaluate air conditioners with "inverter" technology and U-shaped ACs, both of which offer important advantages. They aren't perfect, however, so we'll discuss their limitations as well. We'll also tell you about mini-split AC systems, which offer some of the benefits of a central air conditioning system without quite as much up-front cost or construction mess.

In short, with this guide, you can choose the ideal AC for your needs and ensure it's operating at top form.

Some AC Basics

You're no doubt familiar with conventional window-mounted ACs. They perch on the sill and cool your room by circulating refrigerant through a compressor to collect heat from inside and release it outside.

CR testers report that some of these conventional units—which range in price from as little as $150 to over $1,000—perform well despite using that century-old technology. How to know which ones? In our ratings, note the comfort score, a measure of how quickly a unit cools a room, and how quiet it is on both low and high settings. If you want to use less energy (or be able to open your window), there are some innovative newer types to consider.

→ ACs WITH INVERTER TECHNOLOGY

From the outside, these ACs can look the same as conventional models: big metal boxes that rest on your sill, held in place by the lower sash. But they generally cool better and are quieter, and they're often more energy-efficient. That's thanks to a newer type of compressor that, instead of switching on and off at full blast, gently throttles up and down, maintaining a steady temperature.

The trade-off? Inverter ACs are more expensive to buy—an extra $150 or so. But our lab tests suggest that the benefits may be worth the extra money, and their relative efficiency may deliver some savings over the long term.

→ U-SHAPED MODELS

There are two types of U-shaped ACs, both of which are easy to identify with the naked eye. Regular U-shaped models have a wide slot running

TOP PICKS

These models impressed our testers with their cooling skills and quiet, efficient operation.

72 OVERALL SCORE

NICE PRICE FOR A SMALL ROOM

Black+Decker BD06WT6 $220

92 OVERALL SCORE

QUIET INVERTER FOR A MIDSIZED SPACE

LG LW8024IVSM $420

82 OVERALL SCORE

U-SHAPE THAT WON'T BLOCK YOUR VIEW

GE PHNT12CC $580

What About Central Air?

If you own your home, you've probably wondered if there's a better alternative to a window AC in every room.

Central air conditioning—the multiroom system that cools and dehumidifies the air—is typically quieter than window units and, if you want to cool multiple rooms, much more efficient. And it won't block your windows. But installing central air can cost tens of thousands of dollars, especially if you need to add ductwork.

If you don't want to commit to that kind of project or expense, you might consider a system of mini-split units, which can cost $2,000 to $10,000 per room, according to EnergySage, a website that matches consumers with installers. These have an outdoor cooling unit (but smaller than a conventional central air condenser), a wall-mounted fan unit for each room or area, and a series of pipes that run between the two but don't require carving up quite as much of your ceilings and walls as ductwork would.

PHOTO: MIDEA

through the middle that lets you lower a window sash right into that channel, eliminating the need for those flimsy plastic accordion panels that fill gaps in the window frame. The sash also better insulates your indoor space from the hot outdoor air, resulting in quieter, quicker cooling and steadier temperatures. These units are held in place from below by brackets, which are sturdy but can be tricky to install (so consider having a pro do it).

On the other hand, "inverted" U-shaped models (not to be confused with inverter ACs) have an even wider channel coming up from the bottom, which allows you to drape the unit down over the sill. This has the added benefit of keeping the air conditioner from blocking your view.

Neither type of U-shaped AC is designed to fit every window configuration, particularly in older homes with large radiators beneath the sill or homes with casement windows. Regular U-shaped units also don't leave room in the channel to accommodate a window screen, so while you can raise the sash when the AC isn't operating, you might not want to leave it open for long.

And, once again, you can expect to pay a bit more for U-shaped models.

One final note: Some U-shaped models of both types also contain inverter technology, adding another degree of comfort and efficiency, indicated in the ratings on page 24.

→ PORTABLE MODELS

These stand on the floor inside a room. They're designed for spaces that can't accommodate a window unit at all, either because of the window configuration (you have casement

Match Your Air Conditioner to Your Room

It's important to choose a model with enough power to cool your room. ACs have a power "rating" measured in British thermal units (Btu), ranging from around 5,000 for a small bedroom or office to 10,000-plus for a larger space.

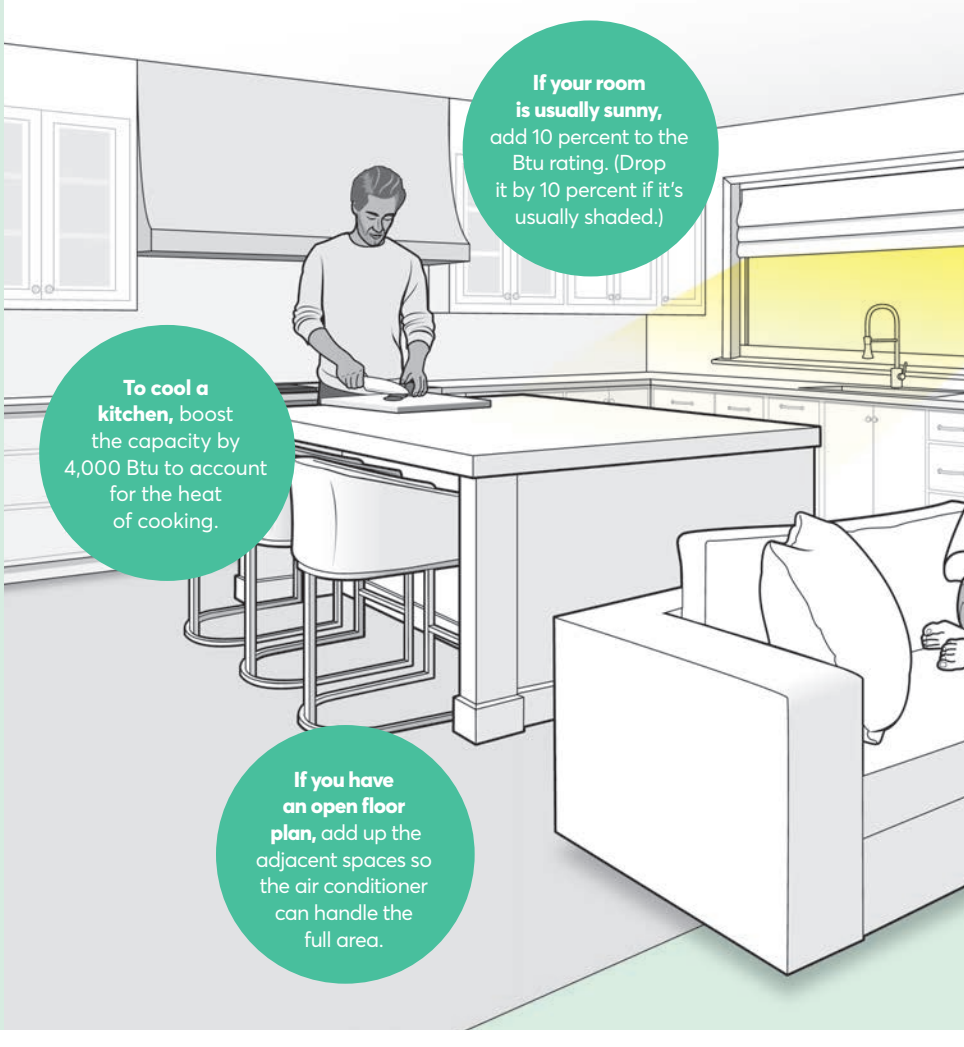
▶ **Start by calculating the room's square footage (length multiplied by width).**

For **100 to 250 square feet,** you need 5,000 to 6,500 Btu.

For **250 to 350 square feet,** you need 7,000 to 8,500 Btu.

For **350 to 550 square feet,** you need 9,800 to 12,500 Btu.

▶ **Then increase or decrease the number of Btu you need based on the factors shown at right.**


If your room is usually sunny, add 10 percent to the Btu rating. (Drop it by 10 percent if it's usually shaded.)
To cool a kitchen, boost the capacity by 4,000 Btu to account for the heat of cooking.
If you have an open floor plan, add up the adjacent spaces so the air conditioner can handle the full area.

windows, say) or because your building's regulations forbid them. Unlike window ACs, which use outside air to cool the refrigerant, many portable ACs use air from inside the room—creating negative pressure and drawing warm air into the space from nearby rooms. So they don't do a great job of maintaining a comfortable temperature, as reflected in their test results and ratings.

In addition, despite the category name, portable air conditioners are usually large and heavy (sometimes 80 pounds or more). And they are usually pricier than traditional ACs.

→ HOW TO SAVE ON ANY TYPE

Whichever style of air conditioner you decide to buy, know that by the time the summer's initial heat wave hits, local stores may have sold out of popular or highly rated models. For the best selection, shop for a unit in early spring. (ACs often go on sale in September, though—so if you can plan ahead, you'll save by shopping in early fall.) Finally, if you're considering a U-shaped model, buy from a retailer with a solid return policy, in case your new AC doesn't fit your windows.

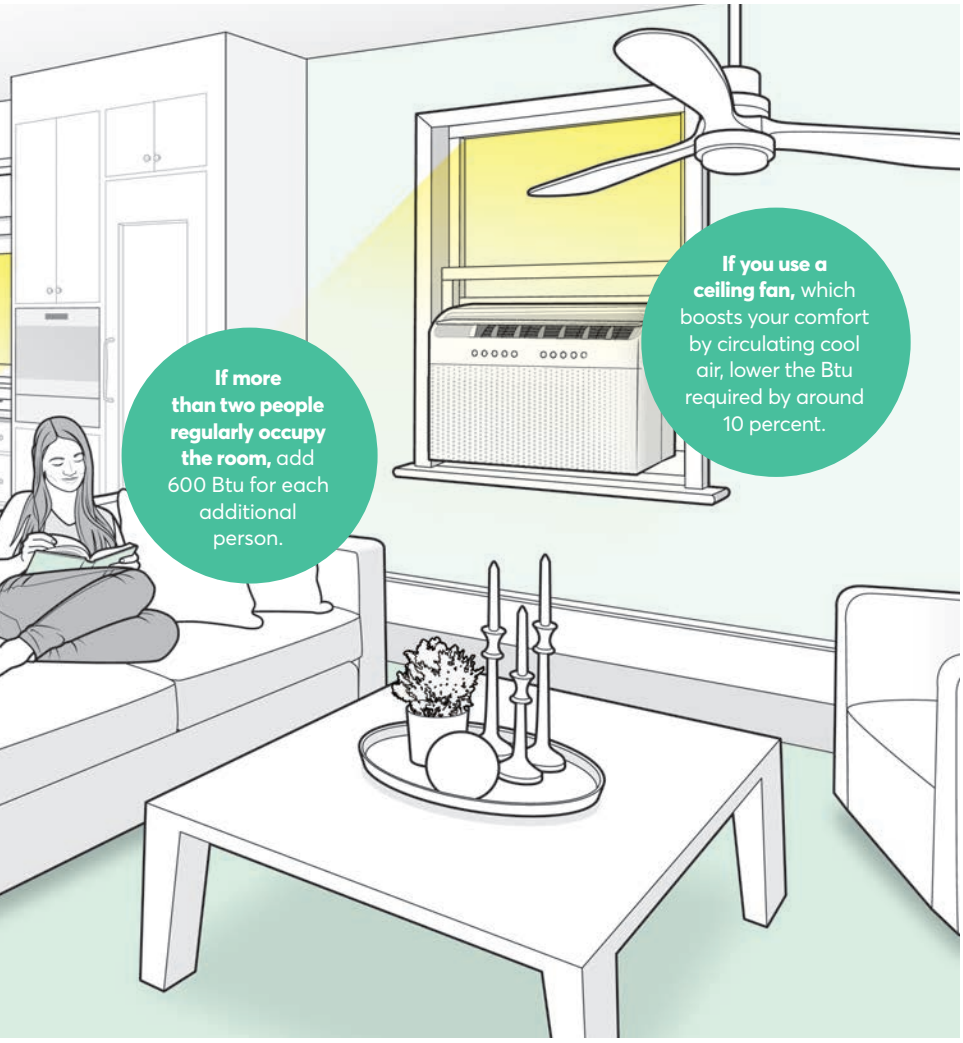

If more than two people regularly occupy the room, add 600 Btu for each additional person.
If you use a ceiling fan, which boosts your comfort by circulating cool air, lower the Btu required by around 10 percent.

ILLUSTRATION BY PETE SUCHESKI

Help Your AC Cool Better

The final step toward a comfortably cool room is proper installation. Even if you don't install the unit yourself, it pays to understand the details.

▸ **Start by selecting the right window.** For efficiency, pick one that's not in direct sunlight. Then consider airflow: Many window ACs can direct cool air to one side or the other but not both—something we note in our ratings. So make sure you get a model that can direct airflow toward the center of your room.

▸ **Install at the correct angle.** The installation directions will indicate whether your model needs to be tilted slightly downward for drainage or should be installed level.

▸ **Consider a lock.** Our testers recommend using a lock to prevent members of your household (or intruders) from opening the window when the unit is installed. Most units come with a jamb (or sash) lock that can be drilled into the sash, but if you have vinyl windows or don't want to put a hole in your sash, the installer can cut a block of wood to fit snugly between the top of the open window and the top of the frame to prevent it from opening.

▸ **Keep it clean.** To make sure your air conditioner cools effectively (and efficiently) clean the vents and filters on a regular basis.

▸ **Use the app.** If you choose a WiFi-connected model with a phone app, you can turn on the unit (and cool your rooms) before you get home—or, if you forget, turn it off from afar.

Ratings › **Cool Factors** We test for how quickly an air conditioner can lower a room's temperature, how easily the controls are to use, how quiet the unit is, and more.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Comfort	Indoor noise, low	Indoor noise, high	Brownout	Ease of use	Directional control	Btu/hr.	EER	CEER	Minimum window width (in.)	Maximum window width (in.)	Inverter	U-shaped
WINDOW ACs, 9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 350-550 SQ. FT.)																	
Midea MAW12V1QWT U-Shaped	93	$500	⏫	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Right	12,000	15.0	NA	22.0	36.0	●	●
LG LW1224IVSM	91	$529	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	Even	12,000	NA	15.0	26.75	41.75	●	
Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ125WD1	90	$600	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	Neutral	12,000	NA	15.0	20.0	37.0	●	●
Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ103WC1	89	$530	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Right	10,000	15.0	15.0	24.0	38.0	●	
Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ105WD1	89	$590	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	Neutral	10,000	NA	15.0	20.0	37.0	●	●
LG LW1222IVSM	89	$550	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	➖	⏫	➖	Right	12,000	NA	15.0	27.0	41.5	●	
Midea MAW12HV1CWT	89	$440	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	Right	12,000	NA	13.3	25.0	37.25	●	
Frigidaire Gallery GHWQ123WC1	88	$580	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	Right	12,000	15.0	15.0	24.0	38.0	●	
Danby DAC100B8IWDB-6	86	$495	🔼	⏬	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	Right	10,000	NA	15.0	25.0	37.25	●	●
GE PHNT12CC	82	$580	🔼	⏬	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	➖	Right	12,200	NA	14.7	19.5	40.0	●	●
LG LW1022IVSM	82	$460	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Right	10,000	NA	15.0	22.75	38.0	●	
GE Profile AHTR12AC	78	$600	🔼	⏬	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	Right	12,200	NA	15.4	27.0	39.0	●	
Midea MAW12S1YWT	77	$460	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	Left	12,000	11.4	NA	25.0	39.0		
Toshiba RAC-WK1212ESCWRU	76	$460	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	⏬	➖	🔼	Right	12,000	11.1	NA	23.0	37.5		
Friedrich CCV12A10A	76	$629	➖	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Even	12,000	NA	15.0	22.75	36.5	●	
Friedrich CCV10A10A	75	$580	➖	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Neutral	10,000	NA	15.0	22.5	36.75	●	
Toshiba RAC-WK1012ESCWRU	74	$390	⏫	➖	⏫	➖	⏬	➖	⏫	Left	10,000	11.4	NA	24.5	37.5		
Costway N4-AH-10N24-A7U1-IT	73	$408	–	–	🔼	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	Right	12,000	NA	10.9	18.75	50.75		●
Frigidaire FHWW104WD1	73	$409	⏫	➖	🔼	➖	⏬	➖	🔼	Left	10,000	NA	12.0	23.75	37.5		
TCL H10W35W	73	$349	–	–	🔼	🔼	➖	➖	🔼	Left	10,000	NA	10.9	23.5	38.75		
Koldfront WAC12003WCO	72	$450	–	–	⏫	➖	⏬	➖	🔼	Even	12,000	NA	12.0	24.75	37.75		
Vissani VWA10 (Home Depot)	71	$270	–	–	🔼	➖	⏬	➖	🔼	Even	10,000	NA	12.0	23.5	37.75		
Commercial Cool CWAM12W6C	71	$359	–	–	🔼	➖	⏬	➖	🔼	Right	12,000	NA	12.0	23.75	37.75		
Friedrich KCS12A10A	70	$1,350	➖	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	Right	12,000	12.0	NA	26.0	41.0		
Haier QHNG10AA (Target)	69	$370	➖	⏬	🔼	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	Right	10,000	11.4	NA	24.0	37.5		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs								
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Comfort	Indoor noise, low	Indoor noise, high	Brownout	Ease of use	Directional control	Btu/hr.	EER	CEER	Minimum window width (in.)	Maximum window width (in.)	Inverter	U-shaped
WINDOW ACs, 9,800 TO 12,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 350-550 SQ. FT.) *Continued*																	
GE AHP12LZ (Best Buy)	68	$450	▲	▼	▲	●	●	●	▲	Right	12,000	11.4	NA	24.0	37.5		
TCL W10W9E2-3	68	$329	–	–	▲	●	●	●	▲	Left	10,000	NA	11.4	24.0	39.0		
Friedrich CCW12B10A	67	$700	●	●	▲	●	▼	▲▲	▲	Right	12,000	NA	12.0	24.25	38.25		
Amana AMAP121CW	67	$450	–	–	▲	▼	▼▼	●	▲	Left	12,000	NA	12.0	25.0	37.75		
Friedrich KCS10A10A	66	$1,300	●	●	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	Left	10,000	12.1	NA	26.0	41.0		
GE AHTK10AA (Home Depot)	66	$400	▲	▼	▲	●	●	●	▲	Right	10,000	11.4	NA	24.0	37.5		
WINDOW ACs, 7,000 TO 8,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 250-350 SQ. FT.)																	
✓ **LG** LW8024IVSM	92	$420	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	Even	8,500	NA	15.0	26.75	41.75	●	
✓ **Frigidaire** Gallery GHWQ085WD1	90	$530	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Neutral	8,000	NA	15.0	20.0	37.0	●	●
$ **Midea** U-Shaped MAW08V1QWT	90	$400	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Left	8,000	15.0	NA	22.0	36.0	●	●
✓ **Frigidaire** Gallery GHWQ083WC1	88	$480	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Right	8,000	15.0	15.0	24.0	38.0	●	
✓ **Danby** DAC080B6IWDB-6	87	$450	▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Even	8,000	NA	15.0	18.0	37.0	●	
✓ **LG** LW8022IVSM	84	$420	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Left	8,000	NA	15.5	23.25	38.625	●	
✓ **Keystone** KSTAW08INV-HC	82	$379	–	–	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Even	8,000	NA	14.5	24.0	38.0	●	
✓ **Friedrich** KCS08A10A	76	$1,150	●	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Left	8,000	12.1	NA	26.0	41.0		
✓ **Friedrich** Kuhl KCQ08A10A	75	$1,029	●	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Even	8,000	12.1	NA	25.0	43.0		
Friedrich CCV08A10A	73	$500	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	Neutral	8,000	NA	15.0	22.5	36.75	●	
Koldfront WAC8003WCO	69	$300	–	–	▲	▲	●	●	▲	Right	8,000	NA	12.0	24.0	38.5		
Friedrich CCF08A10A	69	$450	●	●	▲	●	▼	▲▲	▲	Left	8,000	12.0	NA	24.5	39.5		
GE Profile AHTT08BC	66	$480	▲	▼	▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	NA	8,300	11.4	NA	20.0	40.0		●
GE Profile PHC08LY	66	$400	▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	NA	8,100	11.4	NA	26.5	37.5		
Whirlpool WHAW081CW	66	$380	–	–	●	●	●	●	▲▲	Right	8,000	NA	12.0	23.75	38.75		
Emerson Quiet Kool EARC8RSE1H 8 BTUS	65	$340	–	–	●	▲	▼	●	▲	Even	8,000	NA	12.0	23.5	39.25		
Amana AMAP081CW	64	$320	–	–	●	●	●	●	▲▲	Right	8,000	NA	12.0	23.5	38.75		
RCA RACE8024	63	$329	–	–	●	●	▼	●	▲▲	Left	8,000	NA	12.0	23.5	38.5		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Comfort	Indoor noise, low	Indoor noise, high	Brownout	Ease of use	Directional control	Btu/hr.	EER	CEER	Minimum window width (in.)	Maximum window width (in.)	Inverter	U-shaped
WINDOW ACs, 7,000 TO 8,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 250-350 SQ. FT.) *Continued*																	
Danby DAC080EB6WDB	62	$303	▲	▼	●	▲	●	●	▲	Even	8,000	NA	12.0	23.0	39.0		
Midea MAW08S1YWT	58	$290	▲▲	▲▲	▼	●	●	●	▲▲	Left	8,000	11.4	NA	23.5	38.5		
Friedrich CCW08B10B	57	$500	●	●	●	▲	●	●	▲	Right	8,000	NA	12.0	23.75	38.75		
Windmill WhisperTech 08W2Wi	40	$400	–	–	▼▼	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	NA	8,000	NA	15.0	22.75	40.5	●	
WINDOW ACs, 5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 100-250 SQ. FT.)																	
✓ **LG** LW6023IVSM	90	$380	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Left	6,000	NA	15.5	23.25	38.625	●	
✓ **Soleus Air** WS3-06E-201	81	$560	–	–	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Right	6,000	NA	12.1	18.75	48.0		●
✓ **Midea** MAW06R1YWT	76	$220	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Left	6,000	12.1	NA	23.5	38.5		
✓ **Frigidaire** FFRE063WAE	75	$240	▲▲	●	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Left	6,000	12.1	NA	24.5	38.0		
✓ **Frigidaire** FHWW064WD1	72	$289	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Even	6,000	NA	12.1	24.25	38.5		
✓ **Black+Decker** BD06WT6	72	$220	–	–	●	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Even	6,000	NA	12.1	24.5	38.5		
GE Profile AHTT06BC	71	$430	▲	▼	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	NA	6,100	NA	11.5	19.75	40.0		●
Danby DAC060EB6WDB	68	$270	▲	▼	●	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Even	6,000	NA	12.1	23.5	38.5		
Toshiba RAC-WK0612CRRU	64	$230	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	●	▲	Left	6,000	11.0	NA	23.0	37.5		
Friedrich CCW06B10B	63	$420	●	●	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	Left	6,000	NA	12.1	23.625	38.125		
GE Profile PHC06LY	63	$350	▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	●	●	NA	6,150	11.5	NA	26.5	37.5		
TCL 5WR1	63	$180	–	–	●	▲	●	●	●	Right	5,000	11.0	NA	23.0	37.5		
Haier QHNE06AA	62	$250	●	▼▼	●	▲	●	▲▲	●	Right	6,100	NA	11.1	21.25	35.875		
Amazon Basics MWHUK-06CRN8-BCL1	62	$239	–	–	●	▲	●	●	▲	Even	6,000	12.1	12.1	23.0	38.5		
Emerson Quiet Kool EARC6RE1 - 2023	61	$290	–	–	●	●	●	●	●	Even	6,000	NA	12.1	23.25	38.0		
Friedrich CCF06A10A	61	$370	●	●	●	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Left	6,000	12.1	NA	24.0	37.5		
Haier QTPC05AA (Target)	59	$150	●	▼▼	●	▲	▲	▲▲	●	Even	5,050	11.0	NA	21.5	35.5		
Amana AMAP061CW	58	$290	–	–	●	▲	●	●	▲	Right	6,000	NA	12.1	23.0	37.25		
Frigidaire FFRA051WAE	57	$180	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	●	▼	Left	5,000	NA	11.0	23.0	37.5		
Whirlpool WHAW061CW	55	$320	–	–	▼	▲	●	●	●	NA	6,000	NA	12.1	22.875	37.25		
LG LW5024	54	$155	▲▲	▲	▼	▲▲	▲	●	●	Even	5,000	NA	11.5	20.5	34.5		
Windmill W1W12	53	$365	–	–	▼	▲	▲	●	●	NA	6,000	11.1	NA	22.0	38.0		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Comfort	Indoor noise, low	Indoor noise, high	Brownout	Ease of use	Directional control	Btu/hr.	EER	CEER	Minimum window width (in.)	Maximum window width (in.)	Inverter	U-shaped
WINDOW ACs 5,000 TO 6,500 BTU/HR. (COOLS 100-250 SQ. FT.) *Continued*																	
Whirlpool WHAW050DW	51	$200	–	–	⌄	!	!	!	!	Even	5,000	NA	11.0	20.5	34.5		
Toshiba RAC-WK0512CMRU	47	$180	⌃⌃	!	⌄	⌃	!	!	!	Even	5,000	11.0	NA	23.0	37.5		
RCA RACE6011	46	$220	–	–	⌄	!	⌄	!	⌃	Even	6,000	NA	12.1	23.0	36.5		
Friedrich CCF06B10A	46	$330	!	!	⌄	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	Right	6,000	12.1	NA	24.0	38.75		

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs									
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Comfort	Brownout	Indoor noise, high	Indoor noise, low	Ease of use	Btu/hr.	EER	CEER	Weight (lb.)	Inverter	Remote control	Electronic control with built-in timer	Auto fan speed	Dirty filter indicator
PORTABLE ACs, 9,000 TO 15,500 BTU/HR.																			
Midea MAP12S1TBL	73	$600	⌃⌃	!	!	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	10,000	NA	12.3	73.68	●	●	●	●	●
Hisense AP1022TW1GD	67	$680	!	⌄	⌃	⌃⌃	!	⌃	⌃	10,000	NA	7.8	62.3	●	●	●		NA
Midea MAP14HS1TBL	67	$700	⌃⌃	!	!	⌃⌃	!	⌃	⌃	12,000	NA	12.3	77.92	●	●	●	●	●
Toshiba RAC-PT1412HVWRU	63	$650	⌃⌃	!	⌄	⌃⌃	!	⌃⌃	⌃	12,000	NA	12.3	77.9	●	●	●	●	●
Toshiba RAC-PD1414CWRU	57	$550	⌃⌃	!	!	⌃⌃	⌄	⌄	⌃	10,000	NA	7.9	75.5		●	●	●	
SPT WA-P903EB	56	$689	–	–	⌄	⌃⌃	⌄	!	⌃⌃	9,000	NA	NA	75.84		●	●	●	
LG LP1419IVSM	54	$700	!	!	⌄	⌃⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	10,000	8.1	NA	70.99	●	●	●		
Danby DPA120B9IWDB-6	48	$580	⌃	!	⌄⌄	⌃⌃	!	⌃	⌃	12,000	NA	12.3	74.94	●	●	●	●	●
PORTABLE ACs, 5,000 TO 8,500 BTU/HR.																			
✓ **Friedrich** ZCP12DB	70	$819	–	–	⌃	!	⌃	⌃	⌃	7,500	NA	NA	65.7		●	●		
Honeywell MO08CESWK6	54	$430	⌃	!	!	!	!	⌃	⌃	6,100	NA	NA	50.72		●	●		●
Honeywell HW2CESAWW9	53	$600	⌃	!	!	!	!	!	!	8,600	NA	NA	66.26		●	●	●	
DeLonghi Pinguino Smart PACEL395	52	$580	⌃⌃	!	⌄	!	!	!	⌃	8,700	9.9	NA	72.9		●	●	●	

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines performance test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that newly purchased models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first four years. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members who are extremely likely to recommend the air conditioner they bought. Predicted reliability and owner satisfaction are based on survey results for 4,850 room air conditioners purchased new by CR members between 2014 and 2024. A gray dash (–) indicates insufficient data. **Comfort** measures how quickly an AC can cool a room. **Indoor noise** determines how quiet a unit is at low and high speeds. **Brownout** evaluates how quickly a unit bounces back from a dip in power. **Ease of use** evaluates whether a unit's controls are intuitive.

10 REALLY RISKY FOODS RIGHT NOW

Eggs. Deli meat. Onions. These are just a few of the staples that have been making millions sick. Here's how to stay safe.

BY LISA L. GILL / PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

IF it seems like every time you check the news there's yet another recall or alert about large numbers of people getting sick from eating a particular food, you're not imagining things.

There was a 41 percent jump in food recalls due to possible contamination with salmonella, E. coli, and listeria in 2024 from the year before, according to the U.S. Public Interest Research Group Education Fund. The recalls involved foods from iconic brands like McDonald's and Boar's Head, as well as everyday staples like carrots and cucumbers.

Confirmed cases of foodborne illness rose by 20 percent, and related hospitalizations and deaths more than doubled. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that tens of millions of Americans are sickened annually by foodborne bacteria.

Recent budget cuts at the country's food safety agencies have made it difficult for regulators to perform inspections and other oversight functions, says Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at CR. "That means it's even more important for consumers to know how to reduce the risk themselves."

Every year, CR ranks the 10 foods linked to the largest U.S. recalls and most serious illness outbreaks caused by bacterial contamination. Rankings are based on the number of illnesses and deaths in 2024, how widespread the outbreaks were, the number of recalls, and the amount of food recalled.

While there's a risk associated with all of the foods on our list, that doesn't mean you should never eat them, says James E. Rogers, PhD, director and head of product and food safety testing at CR. "Many of these foods are important parts of a healthy diet. Our ranking is meant to help you understand how to properly handle them, and when to skip certain ones in order to stay safe."

10 REALLY RISKY FOODS RIGHT NOW

1 DELI MEAT

BACTERIA: Listeria, salmonella **ILLNESSES:** 165
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 87 **DEATHS:** 10

WHY IT'S RISKY: Given the safety challenges associated with deli meat, it's no wonder that it has consistently appeared on CR's risky foods lists. Bacteria, especially listeria, are often found in processing plants and on slicers and other equipment at deli counters. The meat is cooked and then kept cold, but it's handled frequently (increasing the chances of cross-contamination) and listeria can survive and grow in cold temperatures. Problems with listeria in liverwurst at a Boar's Head plant led to the largest outbreak of foodborne illness in 2024. The company recalled 7 million pounds of cold cuts of all types and announced it would no longer make liverwurst. A separate recall of underprocessed coppa (dried cured meat) from Busseto Foods Charcuterie is a reminder that listeria isn't the only concern with processed meats. The meat, which was sold under various brand names, was linked to salmonella infections in 33 states.

PROTECT YOURSELF: Heating deli meat until it's piping hot is the only way to get rid of any harmful bacteria that's present. If that's not practical, people at high risk for a serious listeria infection—those who are pregnant, are under age 5 or over age 65, or have a weakened immune system due to a condition like cancer—should consider skipping deli meat, CR's Rogers says. For others, prepackaged cold cuts may be a somewhat safer option. They're handled less than meat sliced at the counter, and there's evidence suggesting they're less likely to cause listeria infection.

2 CUCUMBERS

BACTERIA: Salmonella
ILLNESSES: 664
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 173
DEATHS: 0

WHY THEY'RE RISKY: Like other vegetables that have made people sick over the years, cucumbers are sometimes contaminated by bacteria from animal waste in the soil or irrigation water, often from runoff from nearby livestock. The first cucumber outbreak last year involved whole cucumbers sold at supermarkets. The second was linked to sliced cucumbers in prepared foods like salads and vegetable trays sold at most major U.S. grocers.
PROTECT YOURSELF: Choose fruits and vegetables that are free of bruises or damaged skin because bacteria can more easily enter those areas. Washing and peeling can reduce bacteria but doesn't remove all of it.

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (PREVIOUS SPREAD)

SOURCES: Data on food recalls and outbreaks due to bacterial contamination that occurred or ended in 2024 are from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, and the Department of Agriculture.

3 RAW MILK AND RAW MILK CHEESE

BACTERIA: E. coli (cheese) and salmonella
ILLNESSES: 182 **HOSPITALIZATIONS:** 29 **DEATHS:** 0

WHY THEY'RE RISKY: Bacteria in milk can come from the animal itself or be introduced during milking and processing. Pasteurization—heating milk to 161° F—kills bacteria and the bird flu virus that has been found in raw milk. In 2024, unpasteurized (raw) milk products from Raw Farms were linked to two separate outbreaks—one for salmonella in milk and cream, and the other for E. coli in raw cheddar cheese.

PROTECT YOURSELF: Don't drink raw milk. As for raw milk cheese, the Food and Drug Administration requires that it be aged for at least 60 days before it's sold, which should destroy any harmful bacteria. But as last year's outbreak shows, there are no guarantees, so those at high risk may want to stick with cheese made from pasteurized milk.

PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK (2)

BACTERIA TO WATCH OUT FOR

Although all bacteria responsible for foodborne illness cause similar symptoms, there are important differences in their prevalence, how they affect the body, and the risks they pose. Below are the three that are most commonly involved in outbreaks, listed in the order of the estimated number of people they sicken each year.

Salmonella

ESTIMATED YEARLY ILLNESSES: **1.35 MILLION**

How it makes you sick: The bacteria destroy the cells that line your intestines, causing stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. In some cases, the infection can spread to the bloodstream, triggering even more severe illness.
Symptoms start: 6 hours to six days after exposure.
Treatment: Severe cases may require antibiotics. If the infection spreads beyond the intestines and into the bloodstream, or if a person is severely dehydrated, hospitalization may be necessary.

E. Coli *(Escherichia coli)*

ESTIMATED YEARLY ILLNESSES: **265,000**

How it makes you sick: The most dangerous types of E. coli are called STEC, for Shiga toxin-producing E. coli, which includes the O157:H7 strain that has been responsible for many outbreaks. Signs of an STEC infection are watery, often bloody, diarrhea; stomach cramps; and a low-grade fever. Symptoms begin to improve after about a week, but at this stage, some people develop potentially life-threatening kidney damage. Signs include decreased urination, extreme fatigue, and paleness in the cheeks and inside the lower eyelids.
Symptoms start: Three to five days after exposure.
Treatment: Staying hydrated is key and can lessen the chance of kidney damage. Antibiotics aren't used because they raise the risk of kidney problems.

Listeria *(Listeria monocytogenes)*

ESTIMATED YEARLY ILLNESSES: **1,600**

How it makes you sick: Most people's immune systems are strong enough to combat listeria before it makes them sick—one reason listeria causes far fewer illnesses than other foodborne bacteria. When illness does occur, symptoms can range from fever, vomiting, diarrhea, and muscle aches that last a few days to potentially life-threatening damage to the brain and spinal cord. Very young children, people 65 and older, and those with compromised immune systems are more likely to get a listeria infection and become very ill. Listeria can also cause miscarriage, stillbirth, or serious illness in a newborn, even if the pregnant person doesn't get sick.
Symptoms start: Usually within two weeks.
Treatment: Antibiotics for serious illness, and IV antibiotics for those who are pregnant.

See a doctor if you have a fever above 101° F or you're unable to keep liquids in your system for two or three days, which could put you at risk for dehydration.

4 COTIJA AND QUESO FRESCO CHEESE

BACTERIA: Listeria **ILLNESSES:** 26 **HOSPITALIZATIONS:** 23 **DEATHS:** 2

WHY THEY'RE RISKY: Soft cheeses are another repeat offender on CR's risky foods lists. Their high water content and low acidity allow listeria to thrive. The source of a nearly decade-long listeria outbreak was finally revealed last year when a routine test at Rizo-López Foods detected listeria in its cotija and queso fresco. The company recalled these and other dairy products produced at the same facility. The same strain was eventually linked to illnesses across 11 states. **PROTECT YOURSELF:** Avoid these and other soft cheeses like Brie unless they've been cooked as part of a recipe, such as a casserole. Instead, stick with hard cheeses like cheddar, Gouda, Parmesan, pecorino, or Gruyère, especially if your immune system is weakened due to an illness like cancer or other chronic conditions, or if you're pregnant. Hard cheeses have a lower water content and are less hospitable to listeria. Wash your hands after handling soft cheese.

5 EGGS

BACTERIA: Salmonella **ILLNESSES:** 93
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 34 **DEATHS:** 0

WHY THEY'RE RISKY: Salmonella can contaminate the inside of an egg during development and the shell as it is laid. Last year, Milo's Poultry Farms recalled millions of eggs because they were linked to a salmonella outbreak that sickened people in 12 states. Another large recall involved organic eggs produced by Handsome Brook Farms shipped to Costco stores nationwide, although no salmonella illnesses related to these eggs were reported. **PROTECT YOURSELF:** Throw away any eggs with broken shells. Wash your hands after handling eggs, but don't wash the eggs. Doing so can spread salmonella from the shell to the inside of the egg. To kill all bacteria, cook eggs until both the yolk and the white are firm. Scrambled eggs should not be runny. Use pasteurized eggs or a liquid egg product when making dishes that call for raw or undercooked eggs, such as a Caesar salad dressing.

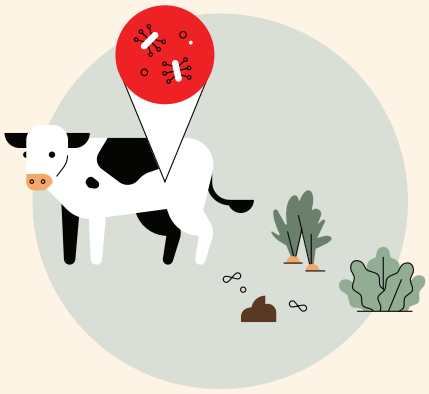
6 ONIONS

BACTERIA: E. coli
ILLNESSES: 104
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 34
DEATHS: 1

WHY THEY'RE RISKY: Exposure to contaminated soil or irrigation water can make onions unsafe to eat raw. They've been involved in several outbreaks over the years. Last fall, investigators determined that nearly all of the people sickened in an E. coli outbreak had eaten McDonald's Quarter Pounders containing fresh, slivered yellow onions supplied by Taylor Farms. The company then recalled all of the affected onions. **PROTECT YOURSELF:** While you can't do much about the ingredients restaurants use, for meals at home, buy whole, unbruised produce and cut it up yourself. (Slicing, chopping, and other processing in commercial kitchens can increase the chances of spreading bacteria.) When using raw onions, discard the first few layers before slicing; the inner layers are less likely to be contaminated.

PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK

HOW AN OUTBREAK HAPPENS



1 Food gets contaminated.

Harmful bacteria that animals carry in their gut can contaminate meat during slaughter or processing. The bacteria can spread to fruits and vegetables when soil or irrigation water is polluted by animal waste. Bacteria can also get into food during harvesting, transport, or processing.

2 The tainted food reaches consumers.

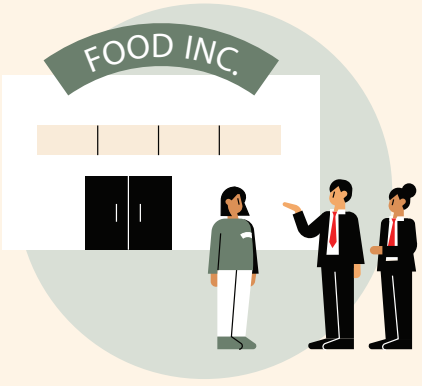
It can be sold directly to shoppers at the supermarket or used as an ingredient in other foods they buy, like prepared salads or frozen meals. Restaurants or cafeterias may also serve the contaminated food.

3 People become ill and officials are notified.

Most sick people recover on their own, and the illness is never reported. Others may seek medical attention and be tested for foodborne illness. When a test is positive, state health officials share results with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and collect information, including foods the sick person recently ate.

6 Alerts go to retailers and consumers.

The company asks retailers to remove the item and warns restaurants and cafeterias not to use it. The media alerts consumers to throw out or return recalled food they may have purchased. (Some retailers directly notify customers who bought the recalled items.)



5 The company issues a recall.

When investigators can identify a source, they alert the company and encourage it to recall the product. (Federal and state authorities can't usually require a business to issue a recall, but most typically comply with a request.)

4 Health investigators hunt for the source.

When multiple people are sickened, CDC researchers try to match the bacteria's DNA "fingerprint" to other confirmed cases, which may be spread across several states. This process can take weeks or even months.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE TOM AGENCY

7 LEAFY GREENS

BACTERIA: E. coli **ILLNESSES:** 117
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 36 **DEATHS:** 1

WHY THEY'RE RISKY:
As with other types of produce, many of the leafy greens in the U.S. are grown on farms that are located close to cattle feed lots. Irrigation water contaminated by runoff from those lots has been the source of several outbreaks. Last year, fresh spinach and a romaine-iceberg lettuce mix that was shipped to restaurants, schools, and caterers caused two E. coli outbreaks.

PROTECT YOURSELF:
If you're in a high-risk group, consider skipping salads or raw greens on sandwiches when dining out. At home, you can lower the risk of illness by using hydroponic lettuce, which is grown in greenhouses and therefore less likely to be contaminated by animal waste. When using whole heads of lettuce, remove and discard the outer leaves; the inner leaves are less exposed to sources of contamination.

5 MORE FOODS THAT CAN MAKE YOU SICK

Sprouts

The seeds used to grow alfalfa and bean sprouts can be tainted with bacteria from the soil. They are also sprouted in water in warm, humid environments—ideal conditions for germ growth.
REDUCE THE RISK: Avoid eating raw sprouts. Instead, cook them to kill any bacteria.

Raw Shellfish

Shellfish—like oysters and clams—can be contaminated with bacteria such as vibrio, which naturally occurs in coastal waters, and norovirus, which is typically from untreated human sewage. Both cause vomiting and diarrhea, and norovirus also easily spreads from person to person.
REDUCE THE RISK: Cook to 145° F. Discard any with open shells before cooking or closed shells after cooking.

Ground Meat and Poultry

Cooking is likely to kill surface bacteria on whole cuts like steak or chicken breast. But grinding mixes surface bacteria throughout the meat, making thorough cooking even more important. It also brings meat into contact with equipment that could be contaminated.
REDUCE THE RISK: Cook ground meat to a minimum internal temperature of 160° F, ground poultry to 165° F.

Uncooked Flour

Wheat can be contaminated with bacteria from wild animal droppings or when it's grown in fields near livestock. The milling process doesn't kill bacteria.
REDUCE THE RISK: Don't eat raw batter or dough. (Raw cookie dough in commercial ice cream is most likely safe.) When cooking with raw flour, take care that it doesn't come into contact with foods you will be eating raw.

Unpasteurized Juice and Cider

Most juice sold in the U.S. is pasteurized to kill bacteria, but some juice bars, farmers markets, or health food stores sell juices that aren't pasteurized. That puts you at risk from harmful bacteria that might have been in the fruit or vegetable.
REDUCE THE RISK: Consume only pasteurized juices.

PHOTOS, FROM LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK (2). PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN; PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH

8 ORGANIC CARROTS

BACTERIA: E. coli **ILLNESSES:** 48
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 20 **DEATHS:** 1

WHY THEY'RE RISKY: Organic produce can also become contaminated with bacteria picked up in a field or processing plant. Grimmway Farms, one of the largest carrot producers, recalled organic bagged whole and baby carrots sold under more than a dozen brand names, including Bunny-Luv and 365 Whole Foods Market, after they were connected to E. coli illnesses in 19 states.
PROTECT YOURSELF: Cooking is your safest bet for veggies that can be eaten raw or cooked. Washing and peeling can reduce bacteria but doesn't remove all of it.

9 ORGANIC BASIL

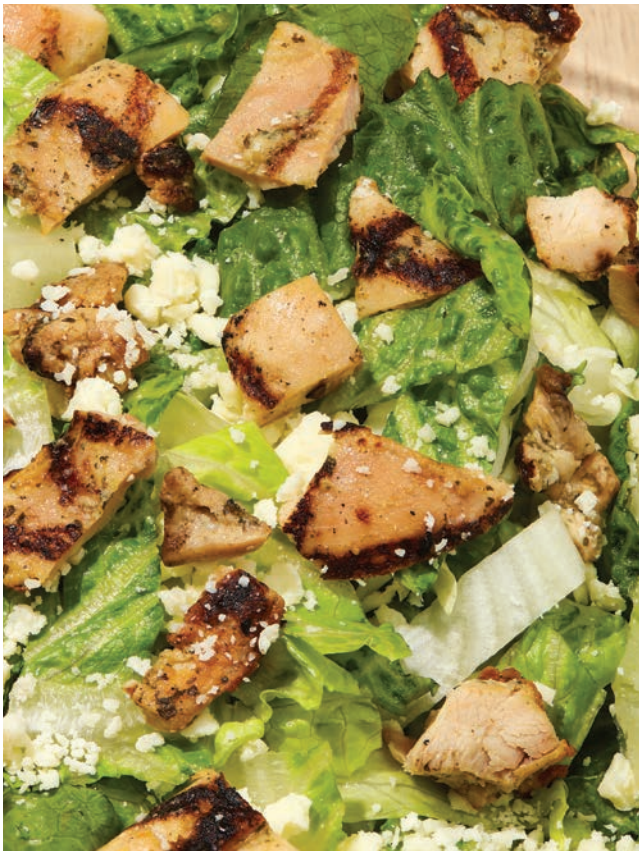
BACTERIA: Salmonella **ILLNESSES:** 36
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 4 **DEATHS:** 0

WHY IT'S RISKY: Like other greens, fresh herbs are susceptible to contamination from soil, and they're often eaten raw. In this outbreak, various brands of packaged organic basil produced by Infinite Herbs were connected to a salmonella outbreak in 14 states.
PROTECT YOURSELF: Rinse herbs well before using them. Cooking herbs in whatever dish you're making rather than adding them raw before serving is the safest way to eat them, CR's Rogers says.

10 COOKED POULTRY AND MEAT

BACTERIA: Listeria **ILLNESSES:** 0
HOSPITALIZATIONS: 0 **DEATHS:** 0

WHY THEY'RE RISKY: Poultry and meat can present a risk of foodborne illness even if it was already cooked when you bought it. Prepared foods go through many processing steps, each of which exposes them to a risk of contamination. In this case, routine testing by federal health officials found listeria in cooked poultry from BrucePac, leading to a recall of nearly 12 million pounds of ready-to-eat meat and poultry that had been used in hundreds of prepared foods, including salads and fresh and frozen burritos.
PROTECT YOURSELF: Thoroughly heat frozen foods. When buying salads and sandwiches that contain cooked meat, be sure they are refrigerated when you buy them and keep them cold until you're ready to eat them. That can slow the growth of listeria and other harmful bacteria.



HOW TO
PROTECT YOURSELF

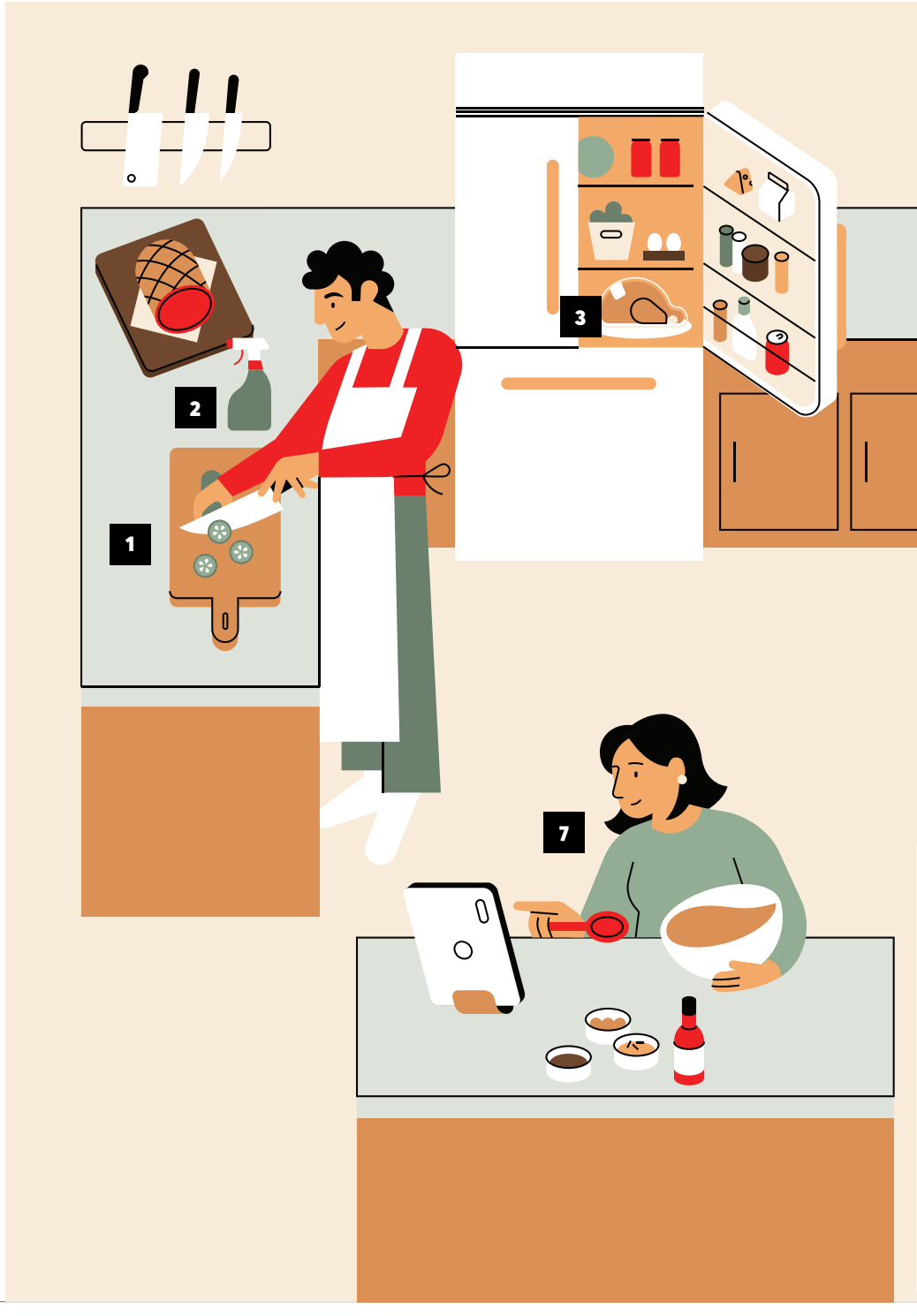
"Following a few simple food prep precautions can dramatically reduce your risk at home," says James E. Rogers, PhD, director and head of product and food safety testing at CR. That's important because in your kitchen, bad bacteria can easily spread from surface to surface,

When You're Cooking at Home

1 | Double up on cutting boards and knives. This reduces the risk of spreading bacteria from raw meat or poultry to vegetables or other foods. For meat, consider a silicone board rather than wood, which has grooves where bacteria may hide even after cleaning.

2 | Sanitize countertops. After food prep, clean the counter with warm, soapy water and wipe with a paper towel or a kitchen cloth that you can launder before using again. Then sanitize using a solution of 1 tablespoon bleach to 1 gallon water or with a commercial kitchen sanitizer. Pour or spray the bleach solution on surfaces and wipe dry with a paper towel or a clean kitchen cloth. If using a commercial kitchen sanitizer, follow label directions.

3 | Reduce refrigerator risks. Keep meat and poultry on the bottom shelf, where it's coldest. Store them in the original packaging and on a plate or in a bowl to catch any drippings. Clean up spills immediately, and thoroughly clean shelves, drawers, and walls at least once a month. Use hot water and a mild liquid dishwashing detergent. Rinse. Then disinfect with a solution



and from your hands to anything you touch. What's more, certain bacteria, like listeria, can continue to survive in warm or cold environments, even the freezer.

There are also a few easy but effective strategies to use when grocery shopping or eating away from home. See the steps that safety experts recommend you take below and on the following pages.

WASH YOUR HANDS THIS WAY

It's very easy to pick up bacteria on your hands and transfer them to your food. Scrub up before you start food prep and repeat any time you touch raw meat, eggs, or flour; after you're finished cooking; and again before you sit down to eat. Use warm running water and soap. If there's no running water, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

Wet hands and apply soap. Rub palms together.

Scrub the backs of hands, between fingers, and under nails.

After 20 seconds (the time it takes to sing "Happy Birthday" twice), rinse and dry.

of 1 tablespoon bleach to 1 gallon water. Dry with a clean cloth or paper towel.

4 | Cook food to a safe temperature. Cook poultry and reheat leftovers to at least 165° F; ground meat and sausage to at least 160° F; and steaks, roasts, and chops of any kind to at least 145° F. Never guess: Use a meat thermometer to check.

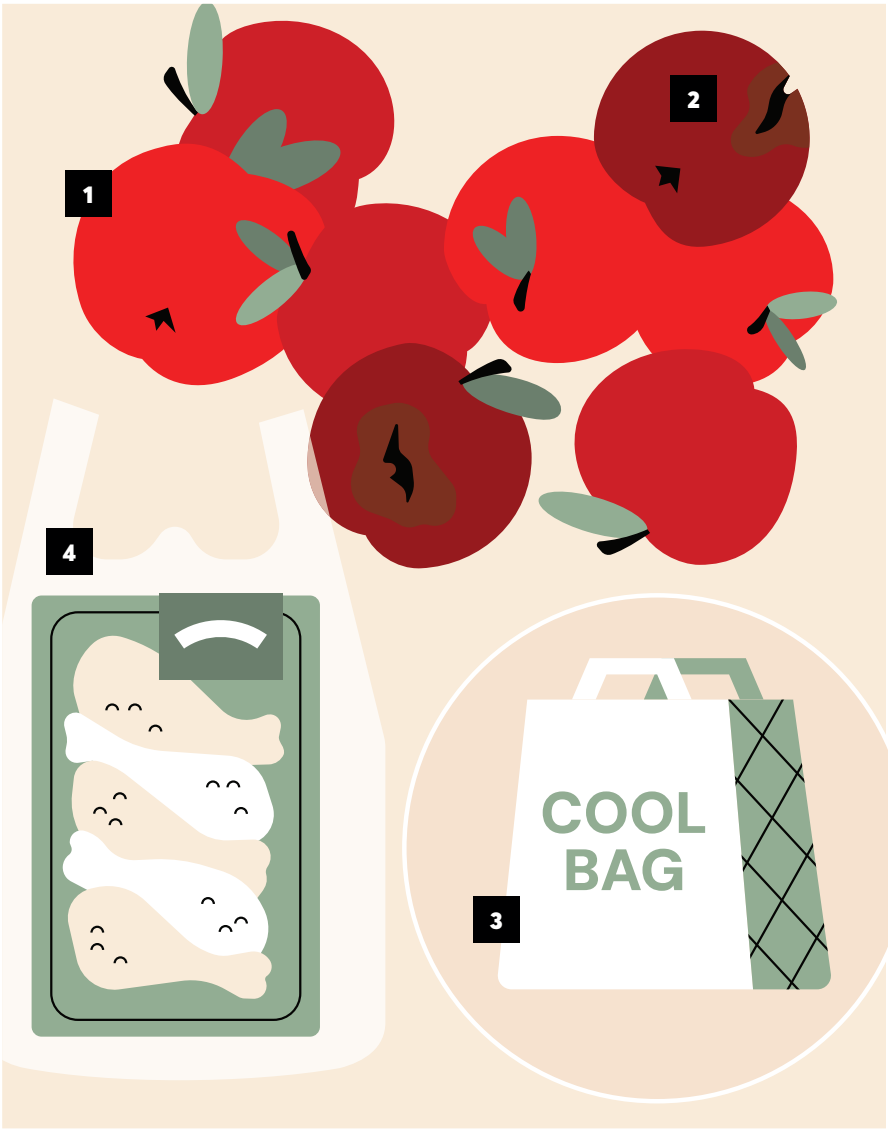
5 | Clean your sponges daily. To reduce bacteria in kitchen sponges, run them through the dishwasher wash/dry cycle. Nonmetallic sponges can also be microwaved on high for 1 minute (make sure they're wet). Replace them every one to two weeks.

6 | Practice sink safety. Do not rinse raw meat. It's unnecessary and can spread dangerous bacteria to your sink and to other foods. Use a paper towel to turn the faucet on and off. Wash your hands after handling any raw meats or fish. Clean the sink daily using the same method recommended for your countertops.

7 | Safely handle electronic devices and seasonings. Touching a phone or tablet while you're cooking can transfer harmful bacteria from the food to the device (and vice versa). If you need to wake up your screen when following a recipe, use your elbow. Wash your hands before reaching for salt, pepper, or other seasoning containers to avoid contaminating them, or measure out the spices you'll need into small dishes before you start food prep.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE TOM AGENCY

When You're Out and About



AT THE SUPERMARKET

1 | Choose whole fruits and vegetables. Precut packaged produce is processed in commercial kitchens, where cross-contamination may be common.

2 | Check fresh produce for bruises or cuts—that's how bacteria can get in.

3 | If it's warm out or you aren't going straight home from the store, bring an insulated bag to help keep cold foods cold.

4 | Shop refrigerated and frozen foods last. To protect your hands and other foods from potentially harmful bacteria, use an inside-out produce bag to pick up packages of raw meat, poultry, and fish, then turn it right side out around the item. Pack raw meat in a separate shopping bag from other foods. If you use cloth bags, be sure to wash them often and in hot water.

AT A RESTAURANT

1 | Note the temperature. Food should be served cold or hot, not lukewarm. Send back foods you suspect are undercooked. Skip buffets, unless you can see that hot foods are being kept hot (with a warming tray, for instance) and cold foods are kept on ice.

2 | Reheat all leftovers to 165° F; bring soups, sauces, and gravy to a boil.

3 | Avoid ordering steaks or burgers rare or medium-rare. They aren't cooked to a high enough temperature to kill all the bacteria.

AT A PICNIC

1 | Serve hot foods in a chafing dish to help maintain them at a safe temperature.

2 | Use separate serving utensils for each food.

3 | Use different platters for raw and cooked meat. If you have only one platter, wash it with soap and hot water before using it again.

4 | Don't let perishable foods—like cheese, salads, cut veggies or fruit, or cooked meat—sit out for longer than 2 hours (1 hour if it's hot outside). Avoid eating these foods if you're not sure how long they've been out.

5 | Think twice about serving finger foods such as chips or popcorn in a shared bowl. Offer individual bags instead.

6 | Keep drinks and perishable food in separate coolers in the shade.

FOR A SAFER U.S. FOOD SUPPLY...

"Maintaining a safe food supply is a fundamental public health priority," says Brian Ronholm, director of food policy at CR. To do that, these improvements to the food production and distribution system must be made.

Make the recall process faster. Ronholm says it's vital that the Food and Drug Administration continue to move forward with its Food Traceability Rule, set to take effect in 2026. The rule mandates that companies maintain records that contain key data and tracking information to increase the speed of recalls.

Keep bad bacteria out of our food. CR has long pushed for the Department of Agriculture to declare salmonella in poultry an adulterant so that it could not legally be sold to consumers. (The USDA has already made this move for salmonella found in raw stuffed and breaded chicken breasts sold frozen.)

Adequately fund state and federal health departments responsible for tracking recalls and outbreaks. "An under-resourced food safety agency could jeopardize the stated objectives of the Make America Healthy Again initiative to improve the food system for children and adults," says Ronholm.

Want to get involved? Use the QR code below to sign our petition calling for adequate funding of our food safety system.

Scan this QR code to sign our petition to ensure that the FDA has the resources it needs to keep our food supply safe.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE TOM AGENCY

SPRING CLEANING SPECIAL

Get Rid of Stubborn Stains

Coffee on your carpet? Red wine on your couch? We've got the ways to keep the most common messes from ruining your things.

BY JANET SIROTO
PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN GOLDSTEIN

Household accidents may be inevitable—food and drinks will spill, pets can track in mud—but they don't have to leave behind permanent marks on your furniture, counters, floors, and more. "With a little know-how and patience, you can remove most stains yourself," says Brian Sansoni, senior vice president at the American Cleaning Institute. "The key is to act quickly and have the right cleaning products on hand."

CLEANUP ESSENTIALS

Here's what the pros do to remove any spot:

Act quickly. Follow the appropriate steps ASAP to keep the stain from setting.

And do this first. Test a small, out-of-the-way spot to see how it handles a stain remover. If you note fading or other damage, you may need professional help—a dry cleaner or carpet or upholstery cleaning service.

Mix up a cleaning solution. Use this recipe: ¼ teaspoon dishwashing liquid, like Dawn, to 1 cup lukewarm water.

Protect your surfaces. Use a white microfiber cloth or paper towels to avoid transferring colored dye to whatever you're cleaning.

Avoid harsh abrasives. Stiff brushes, steel wool, sandpaper-y surfaces, and even baby toothbrushes can spread stains, harm fibers, and leave lasting marks. Some hard surfaces such as natural stone countertops require a paste made with 1 tablespoon baking soda and 2 tablespoons water to buff or wipe away a stain.

Blot, don't rub. "Rubbing a stain may prevent it from being entirely removed," says Sansoni of the American Cleaning Institute. "Blotting with a clean cloth gets better results." Also, work from the outside of the stain in so that you don't spread it.

Upholstery Fabrics

You curled up on the sofa with some leftovers to watch a new episode of your favorite show, and ... disaster! A big splotch of spaghetti sauce lands on the couch. Be forewarned: These spills often require a lot of blotting because you can't get to both sides of the fabric.

▸ **TOMATO-BASED, YELLOW SPICE-BASED (MUSTARD, TURMERIC, CURRIES):** For these spills, blot well, then wet a microfiber cloth or paper towel (see "More Household Helpers," on page 46) with cool water, wait a minute, and blot again. If the spot is still there, mix up a cleaning solution (see "Cleanup Essentials," at left). Apply to the stain until you're satisfied with the results. Blot with cold water and dab dry. Next step for a yellow spot: Air-dry in sunlight, if possible. It can help lighten stains left by curcumin, a key component in turmeric that's usually responsible for those marks.

▸ **OIL, FOOD GREASE, SALAD DRESSING:** If you're dealing with a dollop of Alfredo sauce or other oil-based substance, first check the fabric care label to make sure you can use liquids. Then blot up any excess moisture with a clean cloth and spray the area with an upholstery cleaner. (One to try: Resolve Upholstery & Multi-Fabric Spot & Stain Remover; see below.) Blot again with a clean, damp cloth. Rinse the cloth and repeat if necessary.

▸ **COFFEE, TEA, WINE:** Blot until you've lifted away as much of the spill as possible, then wet with carbonated water and blot some more. If the spot is still there, try the cleaning solution in "Cleanup Essentials," at left.

If these efforts fail, your best bet is to use a reputable professional upholstery cleaning service.

Leather

Because leather is a naturally porous material, your leather-covered sofa is more likely to absorb materials that stain.

▸ **WATER:** If leather has been hit with a splash of water, which can leave rings and other marks, dab it with a microfiber cloth, stat. Next, treat the spot with a commercial cleaner, such as Leather Honey Leather Cleaner (see facing page) to lift any discoloration. Consider following up with a leather

PREVIOUS SPREAD: PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH. PHOTOS, THIS SPREAD: GETTY IMAGES (1); CONSUMER REPORTS (3); MANUFACTURERS (4)

YOUR ANTI-STAIN TOOLKIT

Make sure you're ready to treat the next mess by keeping one or more of these items on hand.

FOR UPHOLSTERY

Dawn Free & Clear EZ-Squeeze Dish Soap, Fragrance Free
24.3 oz., $5.99
target.com

Resolve Upholstery & Multi-Fabric Spot & Stain Remover
22 oz., $4.80
amazon.com

conditioner to help protect the leather.

▸ **INK:** Apply a bit of rubbing alcohol with a cotton swab, then dab with a clean cloth to help lift out the mark.

▸ **OIL, FOOD GREASE, SALAD DRESSING:** When something greasy is the culprit, blot it up first, then cover the area with a thin layer of baking soda and leave it in place for a couple of hours to soak up as much as you can. A commercial leather degreaser can be helpful, too. If the spot remains after those efforts, you may need to seek help from a professional upholstery cleaning service.

Wood Furniture

Here's how to keep wood furniture pristine, whether it's a family heirloom or a contemporary wood dining table.

▸ **WATER RINGS:** Guests seem to have a knack for putting down wet objects on wooden furniture. If you end up with a ring, rub in a small dab of a non-gel toothpaste or any liquid or cream car polish, working in the direction of the wood grain. Wipe with a clean, dry cloth, and follow up with your preferred wood polish (this step is optional). Or, say the experts at Molly Maid cleaning service, put a layer of regular mayonnaise (which contains no less than 65 percent vegetable oil by weight vs. reduced-fat products) over the ring, let it sit overnight, and wipe clean in the morning. Still there? You may have to refinish the surface to remove the stain completely.

▸ **COFFEE, TEA, WINE; OIL-BASED:** While wood that's well sealed shouldn't stain easily, mishaps do happen—like letting a dripping bottle of salad dressing sit on your dining table overnight. In those situations, apply a baking soda paste (see "Cleanup Essentials," on the facing page) over the area. Leave it in place for a few hours, then wipe away. That will often lift the stain. Otherwise, try rubbing it with a cloth and your cleaning solution, then follow up with a wood polish such as Howard Feed-N-Wax Wood Polish & Conditioner (see below). No luck? Look into refinishing.

Carpet

While carpet fibers can be plush and comfy, they tend to soak up whatever lands on them. One quick warning: Avoid dabbing carpet stains with laundry detergent. It may contain

▼ FOR LEATHER

Leather Honey Leather Cleaner
8 oz., $16.99
amazon.com

▼ FOR WOOD

Howard Feed-N-Wax Wood Polish & Conditioner
16 oz., $11.99
howardproducts.com

▼ FOR CARPET

Folex Instant Carpet Spot Remover
32 oz., $6.88
lowes.com

Nature's Miracle Advanced Stain and Odor Eliminator
32 oz., $13.55
amazon.com

78
OVERALL SCORE

✓ **Bissell ProHeat 2x Revolution Pet Pro Plus 3588F Carpet Cleaner**
$230
bissell.com

optical brighteners that can actually dye your floor covering.

▸ **COFFEE, TEA, WINE; TOMATO-BASED; BLOOD:** Blot with a white cloth to soak up as much as possible, says The Carpet and Rug Institute. Then apply your cleaning solution (see "Cleanup Essentials," on page 42) with a fresh cloth, dabbing from the edge of the stain inward. If the stain remains, try a commercial product such as Folex Instant Carpet Spot Remover (see page 43)—or call in a professional.

▸ **PETS' ACCIDENTS:** Scrape away hardened poop and blot the remaining stain or area where your pet urinated. Then use an enzymatic pet-stain cleaner as directed. (Nature's Miracle—see page 43—makes formulas for cats and dogs.)

If you don't have a cleaner on hand, wet paper towels with your cleaning solution and blot repeatedly to wick away the stain; wet the area with warm water between applications. Repeat as needed. Next, mix 1 cup white vinegar in 2 cups water, apply to the area, and blot dry. Stack some white paper towels on top, weighed down with a heavy object that won't transfer color. Change the paper towels as needed to dry.

▸ **MUD:** First let the mud dry, then break it up with a butter knife, scrape gently with a dull blade, and vacuum. Next, blot with cleaning solution (see "Cleanup Essentials," on page 42), spritz with water, and cover with a pad of paper towels, weighed down with a brick or similar item. If the area is still stained, moisten the carpet with 3% hydrogen peroxide, wait an hour, and blot. There's no need to rinse afterward; light will change the peroxide back to water.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (2); CONSUMER REPORTS (6)

Washable Fabrics

Even though you may be able to toss a wine-spattered tablecloth or pillow cover in the laundry, fabric's absorbent nature may mean you need some special skills to get that stain out.

▼ FOR WASHABLE FABRICS

86 OVERALL SCORE

OxiClean MaxForce Spray Laundry Stain Remover
12 oz., $5.39
target.com

Carbona Stain Devils #6 (Grass, Dirt & Makeup)
1.7 oz., $6.49
amazon.com

71 OVERALL SCORE

Persil Advanced Clean Oxi+Odor Power Laundry Detergent
100 oz., $12.97
walmart.com

84 OVERALL SCORE

Tide Ultra Stain Release Liquid Laundry Detergent
92 oz., $27
amazon.com

78 OVERALL SCORE

Tide Plus Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X Power Pods
45 pods, $20
amazon.com

▸ **TOMATO-BASED, OIL-BASED:** Douse the spot in an enzymatic pretreat such as OxiClean MaxForce Spray (see facing page) for the amount of time noted on the bottle, then wash in cold water. Repeat if necessary before drying to avoid setting the stain.

▸ **COFFEE, TEA, WINE:** Start on the back of the fabric, flushing it with cold water. Then apply an enzymatic pretreat to the stain and wait a few minutes. Rub a little laundry detergent into the area, then launder. If needed, repeat the pretreat-detergent-launder process.

▸ **YELLOW SPICE-BASED:** These tough stains get their color from the curcumin in turmeric, which doesn't fully dissolve in water. Flush with cold water, apply an enzymatic pretreat, then launder with color-safe bleach, used as directed.

▸ **BLOOD:** This protein-based stain can be dissolved by first soaking it in cold water, according to the American Cleaning Institute. Follow up with an enzymatic pretreat, then launder.

▸ **LIPSTICK:** Put the stained fabric on top of a few sheets of white paper towel or microfiber cloth, and blot repeatedly with acetone-based nail polish remover or rubbing alcohol to lift off as much as you can. If the stain remains, try a commercial product, like Carbona Stain Devils #6 (see facing page).

The Pros' Secret Cleaning Tool

Laundry experts use a dry cleaner's spotting bone ($3.98 on wawak.com) to get stains out without spreading them. Use this simple device, about 4 inches long, to work a cleaning solution into a washable fabric and press the stain out. Layer a towel behind the soiled item to wick away whatever was spilled, says cleaning expert Melissa Dilkes Pateras.

NEXT-LEVEL LAUNDRY STRATEGIES

You've been washing things all your life, but these pro tips can help you get the job done better.

- **Let the pretreat do its job.** Don't just spray a spot as you load up the machine. Pretreatments typically need a few minutes to work before you launder the item, says cleaning expert Melissa Dilkes Pateras. Persil Advanced Clean Oxi+Odor Power Laundry Detergent (see facing page) has performed well in CR's tests.

- **Use a high-quality detergent.** A top-rated product like Tide Ultra Stain Release Liquid Laundry Detergent or Tide Plus Hygienic Clean Heavy Duty 10X Power Pods (see facing page) is more likely to get stains out on the first wash. Two or 3 tablespoons of liquid per load or one pod is plenty, especially in today's high-efficiency, water-economizing appliances. Too much detergent can leave streaks, stains, and/or an itch-triggering film.

- **Put detergents, pods, and scent beads at the bottom of the washing machine drum or in the appropriate drawer.** These products need to dissolve in water in order to work. Tossing them in at the top of your load undercuts your cleaning efforts.

- **Hold off on heat.** Use the correct cleaner and cold water, and avoid the clothes dryer until you're sure the stain is totally gone from the fabric. The wrong product and heat can set a stain.

- **Skip fabric softener or use it sparingly,** says Rich Handel, who oversees CR's laundry testing and is our resident laundry pro. "It can irritate sensitive skin, leave residue, and limit your towels' absorption," not to mention gunk up your appliance's sensors.

Natural Stone Countertops

Granite, soapstone, and quartz resist most stains, but some things will leave a mark if you don't act fast. Counters composed mainly of calcium carbonate (such as marble, travertine, or limestone) are more likely to stain and are harder to clean. If the methods below don't work, call the countertop installer or fabricator for help.

▸ **COFFEE, TEA, WINE; OIL-BASED:** For granite, soapstone, and quartz, make a baking soda paste (see "Cleanup Essentials," on page 42), apply to the spot, and cover with plastic wrap for a day to keep it moist. Next, peel away the wrap, let the paste soak up the stain for another day, then wipe away.

The technique is slightly different for marble, travertine, and limestone. Acidic substances such as coffee, tea, wine, and fruit juice will etch the stone, creating a stained appearance—even a fruity ice pop can cause damage, according to Clark Lovrien, general manager of Dalworth Clean, a cleaning service in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. You can try the baking soda paste (see page 42); this may also work for rust stains. Or place paper towels soaked in bleach on the area for 24 hours, then rinse with water. A commercial marble-polishing product, like those by Weiman or Zep (see below), may also help.

▸ **MAKEUP:** For marble, travertine, or limestone, the Natural Stone Institute advises applying a liquid cleanser that has bleach (or use mineral spirits or acetone) and then flushing or rinsing afterward.

Laminate Countertops

Plastic laminate, such as Formica, is generally quite durable, but some spills will stain it, so follow this advice.

▸ **COFFEE, TEA, WINE; YELLOW SPICE-BASED; TOMATO-BASED:** Spread a baking soda paste over the stain, let it sit for 5 minutes, then wipe with a damp microfiber cloth (never scrub with an abrasive). Stain still there? Contact the manufacturer for help.

PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES (3); SHUTTERSTOCK (1); MANUFACTURERS (3)

▼ FOR NATURAL STONE

Zep Granite and Stone Cleaner & Protectant
32 oz., $3.79
homedepot.com

Weiman Quartz & Stone Clean & Shine
24 oz., $6.49
target.com

More Household Helpers

Many of the pros' stain-removal techniques rely on supplies you may already have on hand. If you don't, you might want to add the following items to your cleanup toolkit.

Vinyl Flooring

If your vinyl flooring was installed within the past five to seven years, it is probably highly stain-resistant. But older flooring may be vulnerable.

▶ **COFFEE, TEA, WINE, FRUIT JUICE; TOMATO-BASED, YELLOW SPICE-BASED:** Try dabbing these stains with 3 percent hydrogen peroxide. Or you might apply a baking soda paste (see page 42), rub it in with a soft cloth, wipe it away, and then wipe it again with a water-dampened cloth. In addition, yellow spice-based stains can benefit from a couple of days of direct sunlight to help fade the spots, so if you have blinds or shades, pull them up to let in some light.

Ceramic Tile Grout

Though ceramic tile floors typically don't stain, the same can't be said of grout, which—as a porous substance—can easily get discolored.

▶ **DIRT, FOOD SPILLS:** A solution of ¾ cup bleach in a gallon of water may help lift off the stain. If not, try applying white vinegar with a brush (a toothbrush can work well), says Lovrien. It will likely fizz a little as it reacts with the grout. Wipe up after a minute or so.

White microfiber cloths and/or white paper towels	Acetone-based nail polish remover
White towel	Non-gel toothpaste
Cotton swabs	Regular mayonnaise
Plastic wrap	White vinegar
Toothbrush	Bleach
Rubbing alcohol	3% hydrogen peroxide
Baking soda	

DEALING WITH OUTDOOR GRIME

Here's how to care for outdoor surfaces, according to Tom Kraeutler, who was host of "The Money Pit Home Improvement Radio Show."

- **For porch or deck stains,** you'll need a pressure washer with a soapy solution in the tank (like Simple Green concentrate). Cover the wood or composite surface, and let it sit for 15 minutes. (Avoid hot days because the heat could hold a stain in place or add additional discoloration.) Scrub with a deck brush, then rinse with the pressure washer.

- **Wood and vinyl fencing and vinyl siding** can get artillery or "sphere thrower" fungus, which grows in a circular shotgun-blast pattern. Apply a bleach-based solution and scrub. Or carefully use a putty knife or razor blade to remove the patches.

- **For oil- or grease-based driveway stains,** apply a paste of TSP—trisodium phosphate, found in the paint aisle of hardware stores—and water, and let it sit overnight; then use a pressure washer.

- **For mildew stains** on outdoor cushions and patio umbrellas, add a solution of 1 cup bleach, ¼ cup mild detergent, and 1 gallon water to a spray bottle. Spritz it on, wait 15 minutes, then scrub with a soft-bristle brush and hose it off.

▼ PRESSURE WASHER

DeWalt DWPW2100 Pressure Washer $269
acehardware.com

65
OVERALL SCORE

Worried About Your Memory?

It's natural to sometimes lose your train of thought or misplace your keys. But there are strategies for improving your recall.

by Hallie Levine • Illustrations by Joey Guidone

YOU COULD SWEAR you left your phone on the table near the door. And you're having a hard time summoning up your recently changed ATM PIN.

Everyone has memory glitches, but there's no question you may experience more of them as you get older. That's because as we age, nerve cells in the brain naturally begin to communicate less effectively with each other. This can make it harder to store and retrieve information, says Gary Small, MD, chair of psychiatry at the Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey.

Those brain slips are plenty annoying, but they're normal and usually no reason to be concerned that you may have dementia. Treatable issues like many vision problems or insomnia can also affect memory. "It may be as simple as the medications you're taking or that you need to get your hearing evaluated," Small says.

Call
Dr. Smith
Vet
at 1 pm
on Tuesday

That said, the risk of Alzheimer's disease does rise with age. While definitive numbers are hard to come by, it's estimated that in 2016, 10 percent of U.S. adults ages 65 and older had some level of dementia, according to a study published in the journal JAMA Neurology in 2022.

In addition, some people may have what's known as mild cognitive impairment, or MCI—which means you have more memory issues than others your age but they're less severe than those of dementia. And while MCI is a possible precursor to Alzheimer's disease, it can also be the result of correctable or manageable problems like diabetes, depression, or a head injury, according to the National Institutes of Health.

And while we all misplace items at least occasionally, pay attention if it has become the norm to never find them again or if you've put them in an unusual spot—like placing a book inside the refrigerator.

Do any of the above sound familiar? Your doctor can do a brief check of your cognition and refer you to a neurologist for more comprehensive testing, if necessary. But keep in mind that this doesn't mean you have a problem that can't be resolved. Even if you're told that you have early stage dementia, while there's no cure, certain medications may slow it down.

There's also increasing evidence that a healthy diet, regular exercise, and brain-challenging activities may help, says Small. The same holds true if you're at higher risk for cognitive problems down the road—for instance, if you have untreated high blood pressure or a family history of early dementia. In fact, even if your memory is still sharp as a tack, more research suggests that certain lifestyle steps may help keep it that way.

Remember This

What can help keep your memory in good shape, and maybe even improve it a bit? Healthy living basics—managing your blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight; avoiding tobacco smoke; and staying up to date on vaccines—are key.

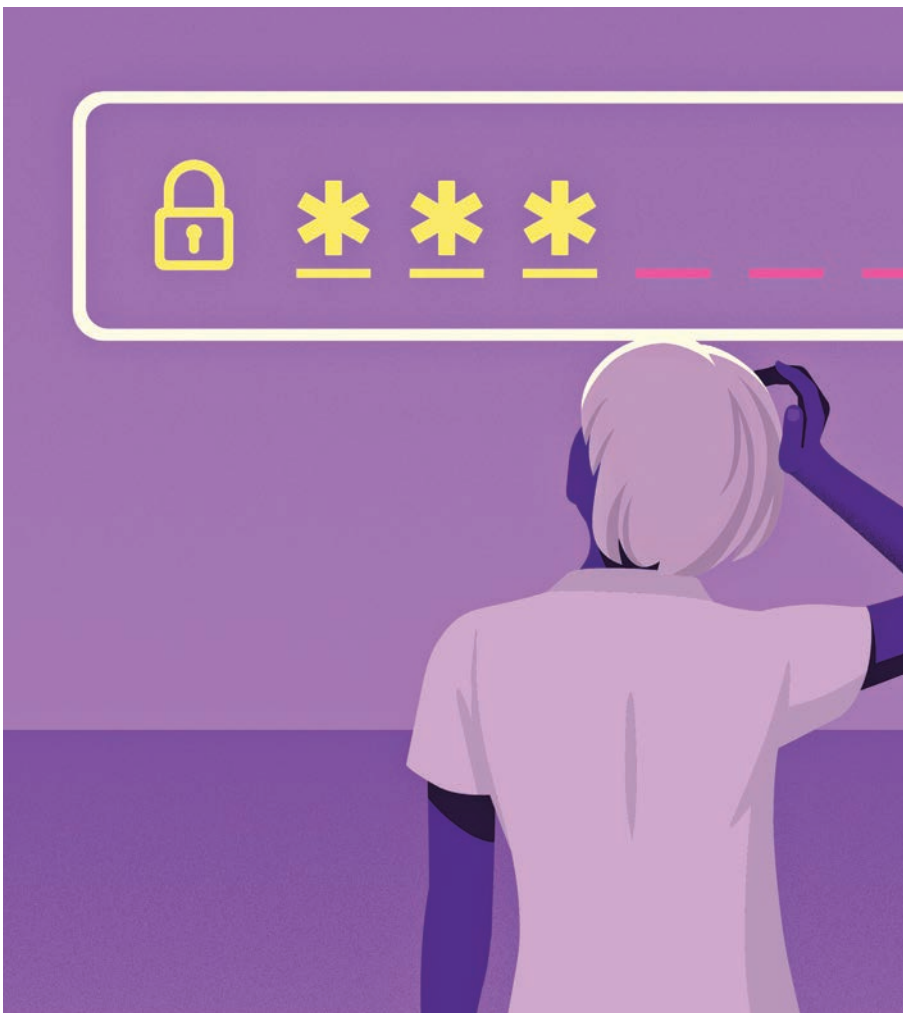
A few extra steps, like the expert strategies on the pages to come, may give you an additional helping hand.

Just Forgetful?

How do you know whether your memory slips are normal or not? One key factor that separates ordinary forgetfulness from more worrisome memory loss is frequency, says Lon Schneider, MD, professor of psychiatry, neurology, and gerontology at the Keck School of Medicine at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. For example, overlooking a bill payment once or twice a year is no reason for unease, but multiple bills going unpaid every month may be.

Likewise, forgetting a word from time to time is a typical part of aging. But "if you often can't hold a conversation because you've lost your train of thought, it's not," says Schneider. Neither is using unusual terms for an object, such as "hand-clock" for a wristwatch.

There are other red flags, too, according to the Alzheimer's Association, such as increasing difficulty with activities that used to be easy, like following a simple recipe or getting to a familiar location.



CHECK YOUR MEDS

A number of prescription and over-the-counter drugs can hamper memory. For instance, regularly using meds known as anticholinergics interferes with the brain's ability to encode memories, says Dylan Wint, MD, director of the Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health at the Cleveland Clinic in Las Vegas.

Anticholinergics—which have also been linked to dementia—include OTC allergy drugs such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl and generic), as well as some prescription urinary incontinence meds, like oxybutynin (Oxytrol and generic), and ipratropium (Atrovent and generic) for easing asthma.

Other drugs that are known to impede memory include benzodiazepines such as diazepam (Valium and generic), older antidepressants such as amitriptyline (Elavil and generic), narcotics such as oxycodone (OxyContin and generic), and some sleep aids (see "Why Good Sleep Matters," on page 52).

To avoid drug-related memory issues, at least once a year have your doctor or pharmacist review all the medications that you regularly use. This should include any dietary supplements and other OTC products you take. If you or your doctor suspects that a medication you're using may be affecting your cognition, talk about alternatives.

ICONS: GETTY IMAGES

TAKE CARE OF YOUR EYES AND EARS

Poor vision and hearing can have negative effects on memory, and may even make people more susceptible to dementia. Vision impairment, for instance, plays a role in up to 19 percent of cases of dementia, according to a study published in JAMA Ophthalmology in 2024.

One likely reason for this: People with vision loss may avoid social situations. Getting together with other people, though, not only stimulates the brain but also helps to reduce dementia risks, says Schneider.

If you have difficulty hearing, you may also become more socially isolated. In addition, your brain has to work harder to make sense of the words and conversations you're listening to. "As a result, you have less brainpower to help with thinking and memory," Schneider says.

To head off those issues, it's important to get your vision and hearing checked as recommended. That means going for an eye exam every year or two after

SHOULD YOU TRY A SUPPLEMENT?

In recent years, you've probably seen numerous advertisements for Prevagen, claiming that this jellyfish-derived supplement is clinically proven to remedy age-related memory loss. But now, after losing a seven-year lawsuit filed by the Federal Trade Commission, the makers of this product are no longer allowed to make that assertion.

So what about all the other supplements on drugstore shelves marketed for increasing brainpower and improving memory? For the most part, they're not worthwhile, says Heather M. Snyder, PhD, senior vice president of medical and scientific relations for the Alzheimer's Association. "No supplement has ever been proven to prevent, treat, or cure Alzheimer's disease, or boost cognitive function or brain health," she says.

One dietary supplement that may offer some brain benefits is vitamin D, says Gary Small, MD, but only if you're low in the nutrient. A 2024 review published in the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease found that people who were deficient in vitamin D were at 42 percent greater risk of developing dementia. If you have healthy D levels, supplementing "won't make a difference, and may even be harmful," says Small.

He recommends asking your doctor about having your vitamin D levels tested. If you're deficient, discuss whether a supplement might be useful.

the age of 65, as the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends. And have a hearing test every three years, as the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association advises for adults over age 50—or more often if you're at higher risk for hearing loss.

Don't put off updating your eyeglass prescription or getting hearing aids if you need them; both may help maintain memory. For instance, a 2023 study published in The Lancet found that when people at higher risk for dementia used hearing aids, their rate of cognitive decline dropped by almost 50 percent over three years.

WHY GOOD SLEEP MATTERS

One lousy night's sleep can leave you feeling foggy the next day. And according to some research, occasional sleeplessness can even impair some people's working memory (information you hold on to only briefly, like the numbers you may add together in your head while trying to divide a restaurant check with friends).

Long-term insomnia appears to have even more significant effects on memory. That may be due to two important roles that sleep plays: During slumber, we consolidate memories—which means placing new ones into long-term storage—and rid our brains of "waste" material that may increase the risk of serious cognitive issues years later.

But getting too much sleep can also cause problems. A study published in JAMA Neurology in 2021 found that sleeping 6 or fewer hours or 9 or more hours a night was associated with a higher risk of cognitive issues.

Experts advise striving for 7 to no more than 9 hours of nighttime slumber. If you need to nap, do it in the early afternoon and keep it to 30 minutes so that it doesn't leave you wide-eyed in the middle of the night.

Struggling to get the optimal amount of shut-eye? Consider asking your doctor whether you'd benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia, or CBT-I—which is considered the most effective treatment for sleeplessness. It's also wise to see a sleep specialist, who can assess you for medical conditions that may be interfering with you getting your rest, such as obstructive sleep apnea.

And if you're regularly using sleep meds to help you drift off, rethink the habit, says Stephanie Towns, PsyD, a neurologist at Yale Medicine in New Haven, Conn.

Sleep drugs may increase the risk of falls and car accidents, and some research suggests that over time, they may make you more vulnerable to cognitive problems. For instance, one large study published in 2021 in the journal Sleep Medicine found that for people on Medicare, routinely using sleep drugs was associated with dementia.

HOW STRESS AFFECTS MEMORY

A little stress may actually help you create stronger memories, some new research suggests. But chronic stress can do the opposite, says Gary Small, MD. That's because it may shrink the brain's memory center and make it harder to retrieve the information stored there.

You can't avoid all stress, but a few minutes of deep breathing can help buffer your brain against its negative effects. That's why Small advises taking several short, stress-subduing breaks throughout the day.

Here's how: Sit in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and imagine yourself in a soothing setting such as a beach. Breathe in deeply through your nose to the count of four, hold your breath to the count of seven, and exhale for eight. Repeat the series for 5 minutes or so.

This breathing pattern may help you feel calmer right away, and offer long-term benefits as well. A study published in the journal Nature Scientific Reports in 2023 found that these types of relaxation exercises reduce blood levels of amyloid-beta peptides, small proteins that have been associated with Alzheimer's disease.

Spending time in nature and doing meditative exercises like tai chi and yoga can also reduce stress. Tai chi, in particular, has been shown to have brain benefits. A 2024 meta-analysis found that it improved executive function (the ability to make decisions), long-term memory, and overall cognition in older adults with mild cognitive impairment.

EAT BRAIN-FRIENDLY FOODS

There's no one superfood that's guaranteed to boost your brainpower. But plant-based diets that focus on whole, unprocessed foods seem to be most protective against dementia, says Amit A. Shah, MD, a geriatrician at the Mayo Clinic in Phoenix.

Research backs this up: A 2024 study published in the journal Annals of Neurology found that the MIND diet–Shah's favorite–which is rich in produce, whole grains, legumes, nuts, fish, poultry, and healthy fats, slows brain aging. (You can get more MIND diet information, including recipes, at theofficialminddiet.com.)

The truth is, you don't have to follow a specific plan. "If you focus on a heart-healthy diet, and avoid junk food, you're in good shape," says Majid Fotuhi, MD, an adjunct professor at the Mind/Brain Institute at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and author of the upcoming book "The Invincible Brain" (HarperCollins, 2026).

As part of your plan, he advises eating plenty of berries, leafy green vegetables, avocado, nuts, and fatty fish like salmon, which increase levels of a substance called brain-derived neurotrophic factor. "It's a protein that's like Miracle-Gro for your brain," he says. You may want to include fermented foods such as Greek yogurt, Parmesan cheese, kefir, and sauerkraut in your diet as well. A study published in the journal Frontiers in Nutrition in 2023 found that people who regularly put those kinds of foods on their dinner plates were less likely to go on to develop dementia.

And if you're a coffee or tea drinker, go right ahead and enjoy your brew of choice, hot or iced. People who sip two to three cups of coffee plus two to three to cups of tea a day have about a 28 percent lower risk of dementia, according to a 2021 review of dietary records. Bonus: Researchers found that this is also associated with a 32 percent lower risk of stroke.

But experts say it's smart to limit alcohol to less than a drink a day. More than that is associated with an increased risk of dementia, according to a 2023 study published in JAMA Network Open. (And if you smoke, work at quitting. The habit is bad for your memory.)

THE RIGHT EXERCISE

Heart-pumping activity is certainly good for your cardiovascular health. But years of research, such as a 2024 study published in the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, suggests it's beneficial for your brain, too. "I tell my patients the No. 1 thing that can reduce their

risk of dementia is regular aerobic exercise," says Towns.

Physical activity may have more immediate brain benefits as well. In the study mentioned above, people between the ages of 50 and 83 who did an additional 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise—such as brisk walking or dancing—on a given day performed better on memory tests they took a full 24 hours later.

Activities like dancing, in particular, may offer more memory-maintaining bang for your buck, says Towns. That's because they require you to use both your body and your brain—the latter to remember dance moves. A review of 12 studies published in the journal Frontiers in Psychology in 2022 found that dancing significantly improved cognitive function, memory, and attention in older adults.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that adults get 150 weekly minutes of activities like those above. But "any amount of movement is better than none," says Shah. "Even getting outdoors to take your dog for a walk is wonderful. You don't have to get your heart rate up to sky-high levels to see benefits."

A case in point: A 2024 study published in the Annals of Behavioral Medicine found that middle-aged adults who said they'd been physically active in the prior 3.5 hours had the mental processing speed—how fast the brain receives, understands, and responds to information—of someone four years younger. And it didn't matter whether their activities were high-intensity (think running) or lower (doing light chores around the house).

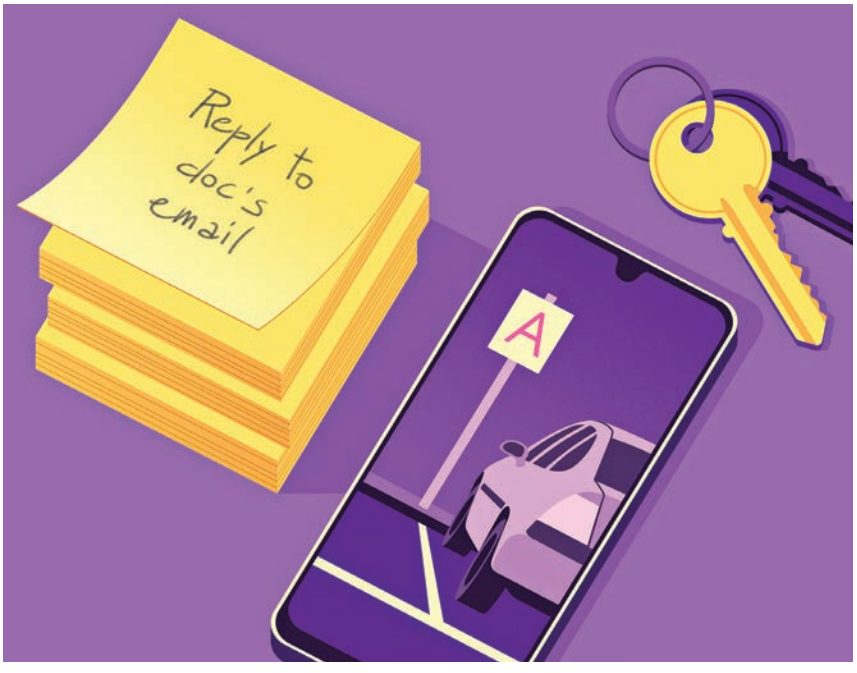
Exercises that help maintain or build strength are also key. A 2024 paper published in Ageing Research Reviews concluded that regular resistance exercise appeared to protect memory-related brain structures in older adults. To get such benefits, try to do some resistance moves at least twice a week. You don't have to lift big, heavy weights to reap rewards: Using resistance bands, body weight exercises like squats and wall pushups, and even carrying groceries or digging and lifting while gardening all count.

DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Novel activities appear to bring more memory bonuses than familiar ones, say experts. "The best way to keep your brain active is to constantly try new things," says Shah. "Yes, crossword puzzles exercise your brain, but when you do them, your brain is just retrieving information that it already knows. You want to teach it new things."

But what? Enrolling in a language class or taking up a new instrument are certainly good for cognition, as are a host of other activities, like doing art of any kind, singing in a choir, taking pictures, and quilting.

But if those kinds of hobbies don't



5 EASY MEMORY HACKS

These simple strategies can help you remember anything from where you parked at the mall to the milk you need to pick up on the way home. Try one or more and see what works best for you.

appeal, you can also just do at least one of your regular activities a different way each day. "It can be as simple as driving a different route to the supermarket," which forces your brain to work harder than using the same streets you always do, says Shah.

Or try a recipe you've never put together before. "Just the act of making a list of what you need, and then following the steps to make the dish, stimulates all parts of your brain," says Fotuhi.

The key is to settle on something that is somewhat challenging but not too hard. "If an activity is too easy, it won't stimulate your brain's neural circuits, but if it's too difficult, you'll get frustrated and give up," says Small.

And for those moments when you have the urge for a low-effort, relaxing activity, don't underestimate the power of reading or listening to music. Both pastimes appear to boost cognitive function, while watching TV lowers it, according to a study published in 2024 in the Journals of Gerontology.

SPEND TIME WITH OTHERS

Socializing with friends, family, and even casual acquaintances—such as people you may meet at a book club or place of worship—is one of the most effective (and enjoyable) ways to keep your memory sharp. It can also reduce the likelihood of serious cognitive issues down the line.

Research, such as a 2024 study published in the journal Innovation in Aging, confirms this. That study found that social interactions significantly improved executive function (which helps you make plans and decisions and solve problems) in older adults. And a report published in the journal Nature Aging in 2023 found that people who are very socially active in midlife and beyond have a 30 to 50 percent lower risk of developing dementia.

You don't need to attend parties several nights a week to get those memory-preserving benefits. Simple activities, such as talking, taking a walk, or playing board or card games with friends, will do.

In fact, games like those may be especially beneficial because they give your brain a workout. People in their 70s who played analog games with others had less decline in memory and their cognitive speed than those who didn't, in a 2019 study published in the Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences. If you like board and card games, try not to play the same ones all the time. Mixing them up means you'll have to learn and remember new rules and strategies, which is beneficial for your brain.

Can online get-togethers also be good for your memory? Yes, but ... "When you see someone in person, you're more focused on their body language, which keeps your brain active," says Fotuhi. Still, virtual interactions have some pluses, he says. So if that's your best option, hop online with a pal or two.

1 GIVE YOUR BRAIN A BREAK

"You want to lighten the load on your memory," says Stephanie Towns, PsyD. If you give yourself an assist with simpler tasks, she says, "you have more brainpower for other, more important things."

To do this, jot down all your to-do's on your phone or tablet, or in a notebook that's small enough to carry with you. And you can take a photo of your parking space in the lot at the supermarket so that you don't have to remember precisely where your car is.

At home, try to always place items like eyeglasses, keys, and mobile phones in the same spot each time you put them down. Once that becomes a habit, you'll always know where those items "live."

2 FOCUS ON FACES

Want to learn the name of someone you've just met? "Notice their face: their eyebrows, their eyes, their voice, and even guess how old they are," says Majid Fotuhi, MD. "When you focus your attention on one particular person, you activate your brain."

Saying their name aloud several times in conversation also helps encode it into your memory.

3 PICTURE IT

Creating an image in your mind can help you remember multiple to-do's. Let's say you have four places to go and don't want to forget any of them: the hardware store, car wash, dry cleaner, and grocery store.

Visualize a familiar room—like your living room—and imagine placing objects related to your errands there. For example, think of a wrench on the coffee table, a wet toy car on the rug, shirts in an open closet, and a grocery bag on the couch. Those mental images will stick with you as you do your chores.

4 USE SIMPLE ACRONYMS

Quick: Name the Great Lakes. You may find yourself using the acronym HOMES for this. Acronyms can be useful, and you can create your own. Need lettuce, oranges, vinegar, and eggs? Use LOVE.

5 CHUNK IT

To remember a phone number, divvy it up. "It's easier to remember three chunks of two- or three-digit numbers than an entire seven-digit phone number," says Gary Small, MD.

DO YOU NEED TO PAY MORE FOR GREAT STUFF?

Shopping for a laptop, a tablet, or headphones? Here's when spending more may be required, and when a lower-priced product will work just fine.

by Nicholas DeLeon, Courtney Lindwall, Allen St. John, and James K. Willcox

Photographs by Ben Goldstein

Grado RS2x
$550
91 OVERALL SCORE
Pricey Picks
Top-rated tech can be costly. But we've got great, lower-priced options for you, too.
GRADO REFERENCE SERIES
RS-2x
Apple iPad Pro 13" WiFi + Cellular (256GB)
$1,500
90 OVERALL SCORE

When you look at our product reviews, you may wonder: Do I have to pay top dollar to get a TV with great picture quality? Or a phone that takes nice photos? Often, the answer is no. Still, there are times when pricier products may offer more features, or do one thing especially well. So when is it worthwhile to make that extra investment? Here, CR's experts weigh in on what's good to pay more for—and what's not. Plus: Our picks for tech gear you'll love, at higher and lower prices.

TELEVISIONS

PRICE RANGE: **$150-$4,000**

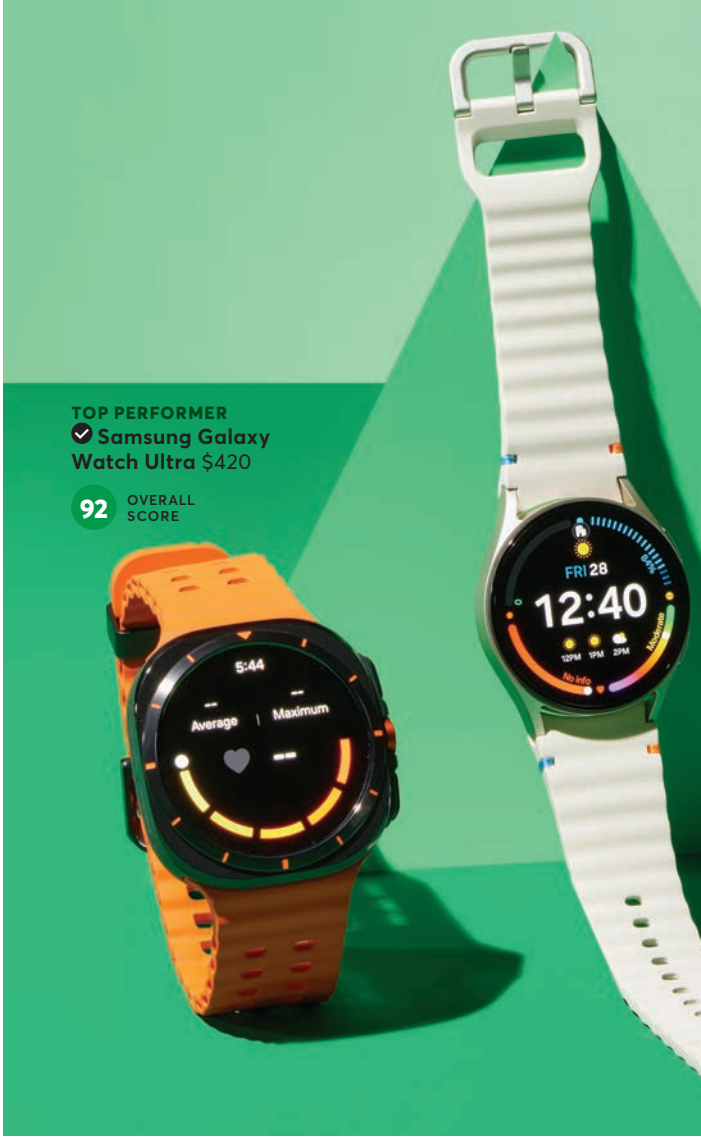
WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? The most expensive TVs have all the latest features, plus cutting-edge screens that reach very high brightness levels and provide excellent contrast. This helps them earn top scores not just for picture quality but also for high dynamic range (HDR) performance. TVs with great HDR can produce more vivid images, exposing rich details in the darkest and brightest areas of a scene.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? For those who want the most lifelike, vibrant picture a TV can deliver—think cinephiles and sports fans—the answer is yes. Top models can also offer sound quality that lets you hear every bit of dialogue and wide viewing angles to ensure a clear picture for those seated on the fringes of family movie night. But the high-performing 65-inch sets below provide all these features at a range of prices.

TOP PERFORMER
LG OLED65G4SUB $2,400
88 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD HDR AT A NICE PRICE
Roku 65R8B5 $640
74 OVERALL SCORE

MIDPRICED EXCELLENCE
Samsung QN65S90D $1,560
88 OVERALL SCORE



SMARTPHONES

PRICE RANGE: **$120-$1,800**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? Top-shelf phones tend to go big—literally. That means high-quality screens that reach 6.7 inches or more (measured diagonally) and batteries that deliver close to 50 hours of power per charge. They also have highly sophisticated camera systems, featuring an assortment of lenses designed to capture zoom, long-range, and close-up shots; optical image stabilization to reduce blurriness caused by an unsteady hand; and the very latest AI editing tools, for removing unwanted objects from your snapshots.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? A large display is a big attraction for many people. It helps your photos look their best, makes the touchscreen easier to navigate, and brings everything into better focus, especially if you nudge up the type size on those emails just a bit. Shutterbugs who choose these phones get the

EXCELLENT WITH A SLIM PROFILE
Samsung Galaxy Watch7 $230

90 OVERALL SCORE

A MIGHTY FINE FITBIT
Fitbit Versa 4
$200

85 OVERALL SCORE

SMARTWATCHES

PRICE RANGE: **$30-$1,150**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? High-end smartwatches are flush with features and designed to withstand heavy wear and tear. Outfitted with durable titanium cases and advanced crystal watch faces, they're built to scale mountain peaks and withstand the pressure 100 meters below the surface of the sea. They offer advanced health tracking capabilities, with sensors that monitor your body for everything from signs of stress to irregular heartbeat or breathing patterns, and more.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? You don't need to actually climb mountains to appreciate a top-tier watch. If you have a very active lifestyle, want advanced health tracking functionality, or simply love the more rugged look, you might be happy spending more. Just know that even the most basic models from Apple, Samsung, and other brands offer health tracking features, easy-to-navigate software, and enough water resistance to survive a leap off the diving board. You probably won't get insight into your stress levels and breathing patterns, but almost all models can be counted on to perform the basics: counting steps, tracking heart rate, analyzing sleep quality, logging a workout, and alerting you to calls and messages on your phone.

added advantage of the very best photography and editing tools a phone can offer. But even the base models from Apple, Google, and Samsung take great photos and offer easy-to-use editing features for retouching and cropping your work. And when it comes to making calls, using Google Maps, getting Yelp reviews, and most other things you do on a phone, there are $300 options that perform just as well as the top dogs. So if that's all you need, go ahead and save yourself a few hundred bucks.

TOP PERFORMER
Samsung Galaxy S25 Ultra
$1,300

87 OVERALL SCORE

GREAT MIDSIZED PHONE
Apple iPhone 15
$579

82 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD ALL-AROUND VALUE
Samsung Galaxy S24 FE
$650

77 OVERALL SCORE

PROP STYLING BY MIAKO KATOH (ALL SPREADS)

TABLETS

PRICE RANGE: **$65-$1,500**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? Top-of-the-line tablets have beautiful, high-resolution displays with silky smooth scrolling—for reading e-books, playing games, and viewing movies and video clips. They feature higher-quality cameras, lots of horsepower for tasks such as photo editing, and extra storage space (128 to 256 gigabytes) for music, games, and movies. Many have batteries designed to give you many hours per charge (sometimes more than 20 hours of video playback).

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? People who want a handheld screen with the power of a laptop—as in frequent travelers, serious gamers, and pop culture fans with extensive media collections—may enjoy the benefits of a premium model. If you just want a tablet for reading books, watching YouTube clips, and staying on top of the news, you don't need all that extra performance, but you should still look for one with a large, high-quality screen (a resolution of 2360x1640 pixels or higher) if you love to watch movies or TV on your tablet. If you mostly read emails, the news, and e-books, or you prefer to start your day with a game of Wordle, there's no need to spend a lot. A $95 Amazon Fire tablet can serve you just as well as Apple's high-end iPad Pro. In other words, there's a good choice for you at every price level.

TOP PERFORMER
Apple iPad Pro 13" WiFi + Cellular (256GB) $1,500
90 OVERALL SCORE

DESKTOPS

PRICE RANGE: **$500-$2,000**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? As with laptops, high-end desktops come packed with power. They have advanced processors, top-shelf graphics cards, and sometimes well over 256 gigabytes of storage—all designed to provide the speedy performance required for complex tasks, like photo and video editing. They frequently offer more ports for connecting printers, speakers, and webcams. An all-in-one model may feature a high-quality display, too, to better showcase graphics and photos.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? For people who create and edit their own videos and those who work with big databases, it makes a lot of sense to invest in pro-grade tech. For someone who enjoys Zoom chats, web browsing, and streaming movies? Not so much. You can always pay a little extra for added storage space (512GB or 1 terabyte) if you have a voluminous music, photo, or video collection, or perhaps spring for an OLED display to better enjoy your favorite Netflix show. The computer's footprint may be a consideration, too. If you're short on desk space, you can save precious real estate (and get more value) by going with a tower or a model such as the Asus NUC (right), or Mac Mini.

TOP PERFORMER
HP Envy TE01-5364 $1,320
81 OVERALL SCORE

IMPRESSIVE ALL-IN-ONE
Apple iMac MQRJ3LL/A $1,300
74 OVERALL SCORE

SPACE SAVER
Asus NUC 14 Pro U5 $800
73 OVERALL SCORE

HIGH-RESOLUTION SCREEN

Apple iPad (64GB) $270

82 OVERALL SCORE

SIMPLE AND BUDGET-FRIENDLY

Amazon Fire HD10 (32GB) $95

74 OVERALL SCORE

ROUTERS

PRICE RANGE: **$55-$1,100**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? The most expensive routers are typically equipped with the latest technology. For instance, they may support the new WiFi 7 standard, which is helpful if you own dozens of devices vying for signals—phones, tablets, TVs, laptops, smart devices, and more. And many provide multiple Ethernet ports for wired connections to a desktop, printer, smart TV, or gaming console. Mesh routers can be expensive because they feature a hub and one or more satellite units that work together to spread WiFi throughout a large residence.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? If you rely on rapid, reliable WiFi signals for work and play, and own many connected devices, a state-of-the-art router could eliminate a lot of frustration. A model like that can handle heavy traffic and provide a stable connection for demanding activities such as 4K video streaming or videoconferencing. But it's okay to opt for a less expensive WiFi 6 model if you bought most of your connected tech before 2024, when WiFi 7 was introduced—those gadgets are not designed to take advantage of the new standard anyway. Even a mesh router system doesn't need to be expensive: There are good models for $100 to $230. Almost all offer useful features like easy setup through an app, and guest networks that let visitors use WiFi without accessing your network and devices.

TOP PERFORMER

Synology RT6600ax $300

92 OVERALL SCORE

GOOD FOR LARGE HOMES

Netgear Orbi 750 AX5200 $380

90 OVERALL SCORE

WIFI 7 PICK

TP-Link Deco BE11000 $500

80 OVERALL SCORE

LAPTOPS

PRICE RANGE: **$200-$3,500**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? The priciest laptops have high-powered technology that lets you zip through tasks and enjoy a fast, hiccup-free experience whether you're browsing the web, playing action-packed video games, or creating 3D models of your next home. Much of this dexterity can be credited to advanced computer chips designed to handle complex jobs in a highly efficient way, shaving precious time from every task without sacrificing battery life.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? Folks who love to use photo- and video-editing software will appreciate the rapid response times in a high-end laptop. Gamers will, too. But if you're just scrolling through Facebook, streaming movies, and making video calls, a mid-range processor, 8 gigabytes of memory (RAM), and a 256GB solid state drive can do the job. A high-quality screen—like the OLED displays on TVs and phones—lets you see images and graphics in vivid detail. And a lightweight design (our pick is a 15-inch LG laptop that weighs just 2.2 pounds) can make toting your laptop around more comfortable.

TOP PERFORMER

Apple MacBook Pro MX2X3LL/A $2,500

85 OVERALL SCORE

FAST AND LIGHTWEIGHT

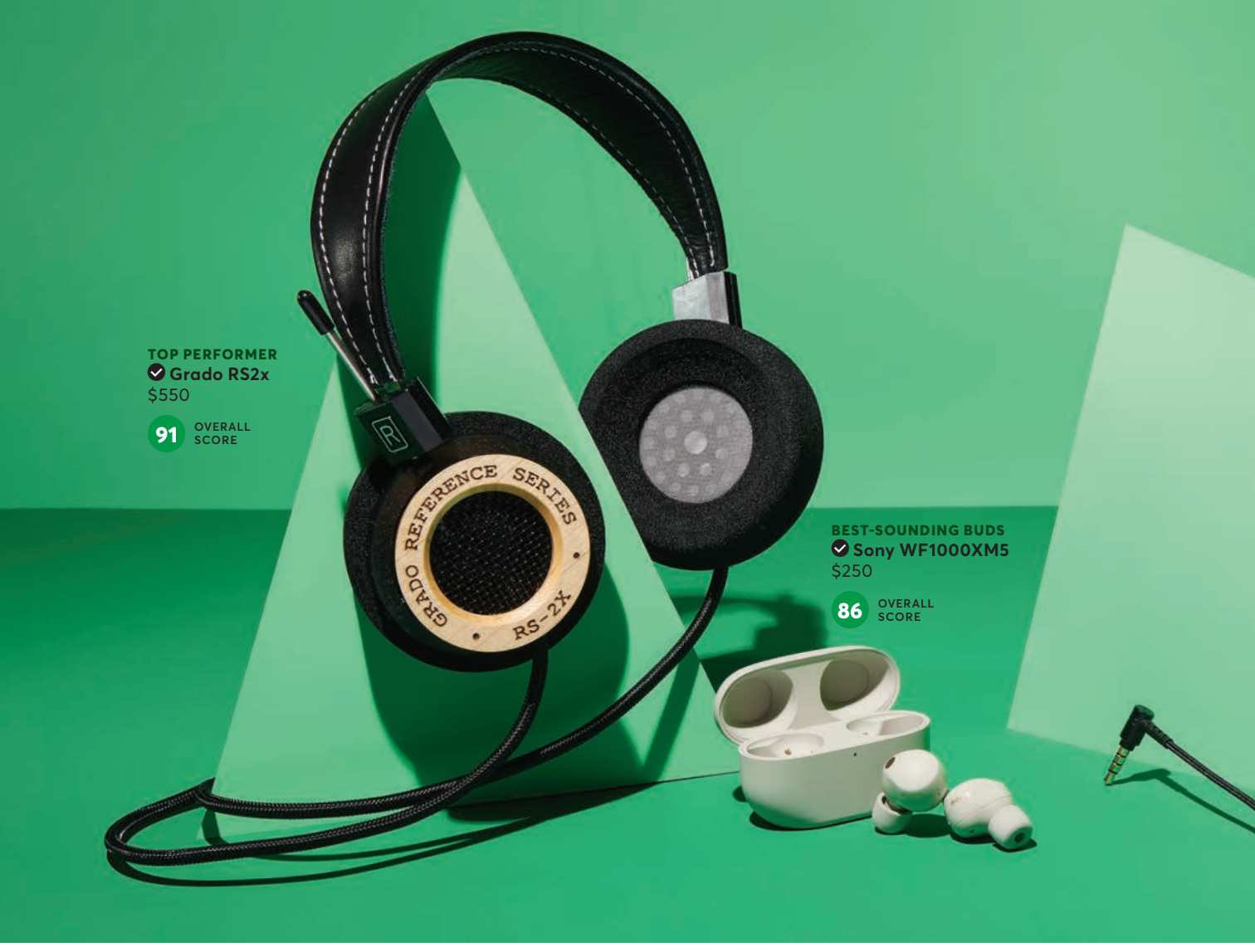
LG Gram SuperSlim 15 15Z90ST-G.ADB9U1 $2,000

76 OVERALL SCORE

HIGH-CONTRAST OLED SCREEN

Samsung Galaxy Book5 Pro 360 NP960QHA-KG1US $1,700

79 OVERALL SCORE



SPEAKERS

PRICE RANGE: **$100-$1,100**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? As with headphones, brand name can factor into what you'll pay. High-end speakers may also allow you to easily assemble a multiroom sound system using WiFi. And the most expensive models are often precision-engineered to deliver awesome sound—audio so clear you can detect each individual instrument, identifying not just note after glorious note but also the ambience and contours of the recording space.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? Audiophiles relish top-quality sound, but not everyone wants to listen to "Bohemian Rhapsody" in a studio-style setup at home. And so you may prefer a portable speaker, the kind you can take out to the patio without fear of damaging it, or throw in a beach bag. You might value built-in support for Alexa. You don't get that with the Edifiers shown here, the best speakers in our ratings. Note that certain speakers cost hundreds more and sound worse, proving that price and quality don't always go together. And while they don't match the Edifiers in sound quality, models such as the Soundcore Boom 2 and Ikea Symfonisk Bookshelf speaker deliver great audio for significantly less, between $100 and $120 each.

TOP PERFORMER
Edifier S1000W Speakers $450 (pair)
75 OVERALL SCORE

STELLAR MULTIROOM SOUND
Sonos Five
$550
73 OVERALL SCORE

BEST PORTABLE PICK
Ultimate Ears Hyperboom
$400
67 OVERALL SCORE

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

HIGH SCORE, LOW PRICE
$ 1More E1001 Triple Driver Wired Earbuds
$60

79 OVERALL SCORE

HEADPHONES

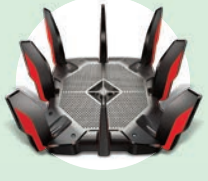
PRICE RANGE: **$20-$600**

WHY ARE SOME MODELS SO PRICEY? Brand name often plays a role. Top-tier models tend to offer noise-canceling tech, too. And then there's the precision engineering required for high-quality sound. The best headphones in our ratings are so good, they let you judge the timbre of instruments, noting the difference between an upright bass and an electric Fender P-Bass. Better yet, they transport you to the room where the track was recorded, making music sound as if it's being played in the expanse of Carnegie Hall or the coziness of a small jazz club.

IS IT WORTH PAYING MORE? Music lovers who listen for the lush layers beneath the catchy beat sure think so. Put on a pair of great headphones, and whether it's Bach or the Beatles, you'll hear things you've never noticed before. But other people may care more about convenience—and that's why Bluetooth earbuds are so popular. The best of them slip snugly into your pocket, pair easily with your phone, and free you from those knotty wires. In our ratings, you'll find headphones with admirable sound quality priced as low as $58. Want great-sounding wireless buds? You're looking at just over $200. But here's one more way to justify that $550 Grado RS2x pair. Headphones—especially wired models that don't need batteries—last almost forever. Audio buffs still adore cans they bought 30 years ago.

5 PRICEY ITEMS TO SKIP

Apple AirPods Max Headphones
$500
You can get the same sound quality at a fraction of the cost. Try the Soundcore Life Q20, $60.



TP-Link Archer AX1100 Router
$265
Billed as a speed machine, this model earns subpar scores in CR's signal tests—at both near and far distances.

Sony SRS-XG500 Portable Speaker
$378
This model provides unimpressive sound quality at a relatively high price.

Montblanc Swiss Summit 3 Smartwatch
$1,270
Ignore the luxurious Swiss watch design; this model isn't as accurate as others at counting steps.

Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 3 Soundbar
$1,000
At that price, you'd expect stellar sound, but it's barely even mediocre.

'I Need a Little Help Here!'

Moving something heavy. Fixing a drippy faucet. Repairing a loose step. It's not always easy to get someone to do small jobs around the house. Use this advice to find the assistance you need.

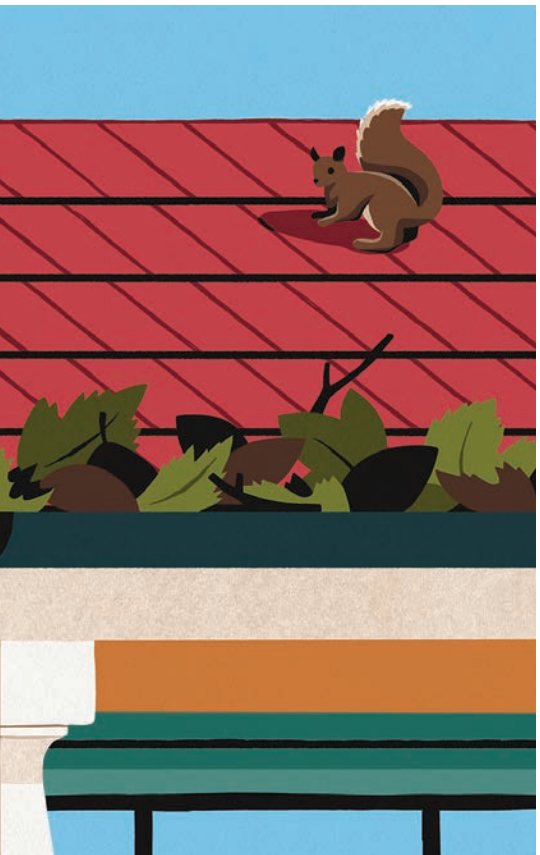
BY ELLEN SEIDMAN • ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID DORAN

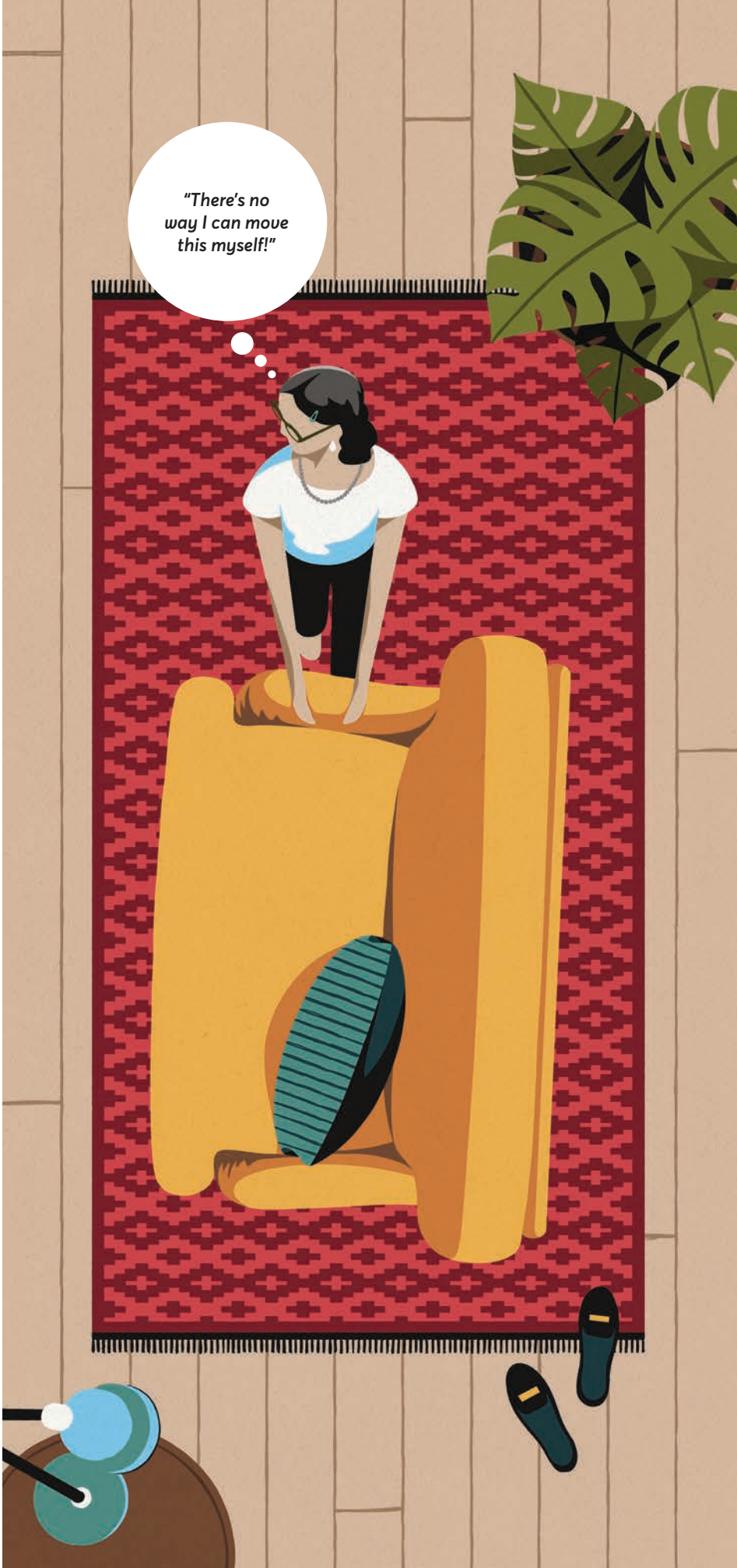
HOW MANY HOMEOWNERS does it take to screw in a lightbulb? Just one, but when the fixture hangs from a 12-foot ceiling, it's no joke. Even if you're the handy type who has always clambered up ladders and wielded tools, there comes a time when the risk outweighs the reward. What if you lose your balance? It's just not worth it.

Sure, in some cases you could phone a friend or family member. But it often makes more sense to find someone else to do the work. Yet you can't exactly call an electrician to change that lightbulb, a contractor to de-squeak a single door hinge, or a mover to haul an armchair to the curb. Dozens of tasks fall into this category: relatively small yet requiring strength or special skills—and, in some cases, involving risk. Ladders, for example, are a prime cause of ER-treated injuries for adults, according to a Consumer Product Safety Commission report released in January. Steven T. Haywood, MD, an emergency medical physician at Magnolia Regional Health Center in Corinth, Miss., has treated broken ankles and ribs from tumbles off ladders, back injuries caused by moving heavy furniture, and severed fingers from power tool mishaps. "People think something is just a quick task they can handle, but a mistake could lead to months in a cast or major surgery," he says.

Fortunately, there are more options than ever for taking care of small jobs without taking chances. Read on for CR's get-it-done (safely) guide.

"I can't reach that fixture!"




"There's no way I can move this myself!"

What Kind of Help Do You Need?

Certain jobs, of course, require specialized training. "For any work that could cause a fire or flood or involves structural changes, you definitely want to hire an experienced and licensed tradesperson," says Joseph Truini, author of eight home improvement books and a former contractor and custom cabinetmaker in Roxbury, Conn. That means a roofer for major roof repairs, an electrician for wiring, a plumber for projects involving pipes inside walls. For smaller tasks, you can often turn to someone we'll call—for the sake of simplicity—a general handyperson. There's no formal training for these pros, so skills vary.

But some states and municipalities require licensing. "The value of a license is if something goes wrong, you have a governmental body you can go to," says John Breyault, vice president of public policy, telecommunications, and fraud at the National Consumers League, an advocacy organization. "And if someone is supposed to have one and doesn't, that's a red flag."

Regardless of licensing requirements, anyone you hire to do repair work should have general liability insurance. Then, if they damage your home or cause an injury—say, you trip over a tool belt—a homeowners insurance policy won't be the first or only coverage, says Michael Richmond-Crum at the American Property Casualty Insurance Association.

Where to Find the Right Pro

There's nothing like a referral from a friend or neighbor—or, if you're an apartment dweller, hiring someone in the building (say, the super) to do the work you need. If those options are dead ends, experts suggest asking local real estate agents for recommendations because they often hire help to fix up homes for sale. You can also get referrals from contractors and carpenters who have done projects for you in the past, says Aaron Enfinger, president of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry. Or maybe there's a contractor working on a nearby home whose work looks good. Here's advice for looking farther afield.

HOME SERVICE MARKETPLACES

These allow you to browse a large pool of pros for free, but the onus is on you to evaluate them. Workers self-report license and insurance information, so vet anyone you're considering and read reviews on these sites (and online). A few examples:

▶ **Taskrabbit** is geared toward one-off chores like furniture assembly and TV mounting, with hourly rates displayed. Same-day booking is possible. You'll pay a service fee (a percentage of the total price of a job) plus something called a "Trust & Support Fee." (Details aren't disclosed on the site, and Taskrabbit declined CR's request to share further information on its fees.) If a job isn't done right, you may be out of luck. The site's "Happiness Pledge" mentions property damage, bodily injury, and theft but not shoddy work.

▶ **Angi (formerly Angie's List)** lists specialists in plumbing, electrical work, and construction management, as well as handypeople. It lets you request job quotes from several candidates with a couple of clicks. You must first submit a phone number and email address, and agree to receive texts and calls, however, which means you might get hit with a barrage of messages.

7 QUESTIONS TO ASK

Before you hire someone to do repair work in your home, nail down these points.

1

Are you insured? Licensed?
The handyperson should have a certificate of insurance (COI). Also confirm that the pro is compliant with any required licensing in your area.

2

Who will do the work?
If another helper is coming over, find out about their credentials and how long they've been working with the pro you're hiring. Along the same lines, when a handyperson who hasn't been personally referred comes to your home for the first time, you might want to have a partner or friend around to make you feel more comfortable, and take safety precautions with valuables, says Ira Rheingold, executive director of the National Association of Consumer Advocates.

3

Have you done this type of thing before?
A pro might be a jack of all trades but a master of only a few. "You don't want someone learning on the job," says Larry Towner, co-host of the "Handyman Pros Radio Show" podcast. Sandi Ledet of Mandeville, La., learned a lesson the hard way when she had to replace two doors leading to a patio. "The handyman came

recommended by our neighbor, and I just assumed he had the skills," she says. When he finished, one door had a sizable gap on top and neither was properly aligned. She ended up hiring another pro to reinstall them, essentially paying twice for the job. As a client, make good choices: Don't try to get a handyperson to take on work they aren't qualified to do.

4

Can I call your references?
Ideally, you want to chat with someone the handyperson has worked with for several years. One good starting question from Aaron Enfinger, president of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, is "Would you use them again?" You can also ask for an example of a time something didn't go right and how it was resolved.

5

How long will the work take?
A pro should be able to ballpark the timing and tell you while on the job if that changes.

6

What will you need?
If the worker is buying materials, confirm whether you'll be charged for the time it takes to pick them up, and request receipts. Get detailed specs from them for fixtures like a ceiling fan or faucet that you'll pick out, so you don't waste time (theirs or yours) with something that doesn't fit.

7

What guarantees do you offer?
Protect yourself from what's known as the "taillight warranty" (as in, a home pro's support ending once they drive away). Verify that they'll stand by their work, and for how long.

▶ **Thumbtack** is similar to Angi. It offers more details, like a pro's average response time, specifics about the work they do, and photos of past projects.

FIX-IT FRANCHISES These businesses—Ace Handyman and Mr. Handyman are two national options—vet and insure their staff. "They have a name and reputation to protect, so they want you to have a good experience," Enfinger says. Hourly rates might be on the higher side (see "What Help Costs Right Now" on the facing page) and come with additional service fees; ask about those. Also ask what happens if the pro exceeds the estimated time.

SOCIAL NETWORKS If you post a request for a handyperson on Nextdoor or in your local Facebook group, you'll probably get responses—and might even land a recommendation from someone you know. With strangers, be cautious. Users can set up fake accounts to leave reviews, Breyault says.

JUNK REMOVERS When you have to get rid of heavy furniture, companies like the Junkluggers and 1-800-Got-Junk will usually send a truck, give a price on the spot, and offer to do the job right away. They typically charge by how much of the truck your stuff fills. The average cost for half a 1-800-Got-Junk truck is $360. You might be able to get the job done for free by posting the piece in a local Buy Nothing Facebook group. Be clear in your post that the recipient needs to be able to move the piece themselves; confirm this point before pickup. The Salvation Army will also remove and take away certain large pieces in good shape, like couches, armoires, and cabinets.

CONCIERGE SERVICES A new generation of businesses manage ongoing house repairs and preventive maintenance for homeowners. A subscription gets you a manager who schedules appointments with trained staff or vetted external pros as needed. Some companies charge a flat monthly or annual fee for a set number of hours; others have separate hourly rates. Honey Homes, a 4-year-old company that serves the San Francisco Bay area; Los Angeles; Dallas; Austin, Texas; and Chicago, offers a dedicated handyperson and 42 service hours per year for an annual up-front fee of $3,540, which breaks down to $295 a month; if you cancel during the year, you get a prorated amount back. To find a local service, search online for "handyman concierge near me."

VIRTUAL HOME REPAIR EXPERTS The Frontdoor app, launched two years ago, offers video chats with handypeople as well as plumbing, electrical, HVAC, and appliance experts. For a $149 annual membership, you get unlimited sessions. You can try the service for free, no credit card required. This might be appealing to DIYers—and expert supervision can be safer than random videos on YouTube.

Take Some Simple Precautions

These steps can protect your money and ensure you're satisfied with the results.

▶ **Get it in writing.** Whether the document is a handwritten estimate or a digital contract, it should list every task and the hourly rate or project fee.

▶ **Settle the bill after, not before.** It's not unusual to be asked for a deposit, but if a pro wants more than 10 percent, move on, says Allen Lee, a handyman in Roseville, Calif., who coaches other pros. "And beware if they say they need money to buy materials. Any reputable business owner should have the funds for that."

▶ **Pay with plastic,** if possible. "A credit card is the safest way to pay, because you can dispute the payment if something goes wrong with the job," says Ira Rheingold, executive

director of the National Association of Consumer Advocates. Checks and electronic payments like PayPal, Venmo, and Zelle don't offer the same level of protection.

▶ **Know the scams.** Beware of anyone who shows up at your door and points out problems they can fix cheaply or offers roof repairs or driveway sealing because they were "in the area" and have "leftover materials." "It's not unusual for burglars to pose as odd-jobbers looking for work so they can get into homes," Breyault says.

Make Sure the Work Goes Well

"Have respect, communicate, and be considerate," says Larry Towner a handyman in Atlanta who co-hosts the "Handyman Pros Radio Show" podcast. A few more pointers:

▶ **Grab the appointment.** If a pro lets you know they're free the next day or calls because of a cancellation, jump on it. If you're difficult to schedule, it may be hard to get someone over.

▶ **Keep a running to-do list.** Jot down repairs as they crop up, or hunt around your house to compile a list. If you can offer a half day's work, you'll be more appealing than a client with fewer tasks. And it could be more economical for you.

▶ **Tell and show.** Walk through tasks together. Hanging wallpaper? Specify which direction the pattern should face. Installing art? Stay nearby so you're available for questions.

▶ **Prep the space.** Clear clutter so that the pro has room to work, and make sure your pets are in another room with the door closed, Truini says.

▶ **Check the work.** If the pro doesn't talk you through what they've done, take a look yourself. Immediately address concerns and requests; there's no guarantee they'll be available to come back soon to fix a problem.

▶ **Post a great review.** Positive public feedback is invaluable, Lee says. If you received wonderful service, share that.

WHAT HELP COSTS RIGHT NOW

Hourly fees for small jobs and repairs range from $50 to $150 nationwide. Some pros charge a flat rate. Those who charge for in-person estimates might apply that fee to the cost of the job if you hire them. You can also ask if it's possible to text tasks, photos, or videos to give the handyperson a sense of the scope of the job to get a firm estimate before they arrive, says Joseph Truini, a home improvement author in Roxbury, Conn. Travel to a rural area or through congested city streets could raise the price. So could problems unearthed midprocess. For example, a loose front step on your porch might reveal rotted support. Other factors that can raise the cost include:

Drying Time
Projects that require two visits will obviously cost more than those that can be checked off in one. Primer and paint need time to set, and new drywall can't be sanded until 24 hours after it's installed.

Tricky Access or Delicate Surfaces
It will take extra time for a pro to squeeze into a crawl space to do work or to replace a cabinet in a cramped spot, like a tiny powder room. And hanging shelves or artwork in older homes with delicate plaster walls requires an installer to tread more carefully than if he's working with drywall, says Larry Towner of the "Handyman Pros Radio Show" podcast.

Inflation
The cost of basic materials like drywall and concrete rose during the pandemic and remain high, according to the National Association of Home Builders. If you priced out deck work a couple of years ago and you're ready to commit now, a new estimate could be higher.

CR'S ULTIMATE GUIDE TO

Countertop Appliances

From coffee makers to microwaves, we test hundreds of countertop helpers each year. Read on for the best in our ratings.

BY ALTHEA CHANG-COOK

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS BY ERIC HEINTZ

▲ FULL-SIZED/PERSONAL BLENDER

$ **GE G8BCAASSPSS** $120

77 OVERALL SCORE

It's **hard to imagine** a kitchen without its share of small appliances—those indispensable, time-saving tools we depend on for everyday meals nearly as much as our stoves and refrigerators. And these days, new versions of compact kitchen helpers are more versatile and feature-packed than ever. But as you shop, you might wonder how well these new features work. Can that multifunctional food processor actually whip up a terrific smoothie? Will that toaster oven brown your breakfast bread as reliably as your old pop-up? The truth is, not always. We'll guide you to the best new features to look for—and the ones to skip—when shopping for your next air fryer, microwave, toaster oven, mixer, coffee maker, and more.

◂ DRIP COFFEE MAKER WITH CARAFE

Haden 14-Cup Programmable (75139) $100

84 OVERALL SCORE

▾ 2-SLICE TOASTER

Breville A Bit More BTA720XL 2-Slice $90

92 OVERALL SCORE

◂ IMMERSION BLENDER

Amazon Basics MJ-BH5001W2 $40

91 OVERALL SCORE

COOKING HELPERS

- ▸ **Air Fryers** P. 72
- ▸ **Countertop Microwaves** P. 75
- ▸ **Toaster Ovens** P. 78
- ▸ **Toasters** P. 80

FAST & EASY PREP TOOLS

- ▸ **Blenders** P. 82
- ▸ **Immersion Blenders** P. 85
- ▸ **Hand Mixers** P. 86
- ▸ **Stand Mixers** P. 87
- ▸ **Food Processors & Choppers** P. 89

BETTER BREW ESSENTIALS

- ▸ **Drip Coffee Makers** P. 92
- ▸ **Pod Coffee Makers** P. 97

WORSE — BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Cooking Helpers

Crispy chicken from your air fryer. Creamy mashed potatoes from your microwave. Buttery small-batch biscuits from your toaster oven. As the capabilities of countertop appliances grow, so does their ability to make quick, easy work of daily meals.

AIR FRYER
Dash Tasti-Crisp DCAF260
$60
81 OVERALL SCORE

AIR FRYERS

These don't actually fry your food. A convection fan circulates hot air through the basket, concentrating heat to evenly cook and crisp up snacks using little or no oil. They can turn out french fries, chicken wings, and even full meals like salmon with a side of asparagus. And they can make a perfectly toasted grilled cheese sandwich and revive leftovers—like pizza—better than any microwave. So it's not surprising that a nationally representative CR survey in January 2025 found that nearly half of air-fryer owners used their appliance more than once a week.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Air fryers in CR's ratings have claimed sizes ranging from 2 to 11 quarts. We measure the volume of each air fryer basket, which you'll see in the ratings on the facing page. A smaller model may be big enough to heat up frozen snacks for one or two people, while a model that's 7 quarts or larger can handle a full pound of french fries. Some larger models, such as the Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19089, $140, have two baskets, so you can cook separate dishes at the same time. Certain fryers have a handy "shake reminder" that beeps when it's time to shake the basket to ensure the most evenly crisped results.

Our ease-of-use ratings will help you find a model with straightforward, intuitive controls and markings that are easy to read and interpret. If you'd rather avoid nonstick cookware made with PTFE (Teflon), consider a model with a basket made of nonstick ceramic, which is less likely to contain PFAS. Also check the scores for noise. Our tests have found that the whirring of some air fryers can be difficult to talk over.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** You don't need to shell out big bucks to get a great air fryer. The top one in our ratings, the Dash Tasti-Crisp, costs around $60. And don't just buy by brand. The best-known ones, like Instant and Ninja, didn't score as well as the relative newcomers Dash and Crux in our tests.

As you shop, think about the features you'll really need.

EXPERT TIP

"A clear basket or a viewing window allows you to see your food as it's cooking, so you won't have to pull the basket out to check it."

SCOTT COLLOMB
Assistant Test Leader

It's not worth paying extra for functions like dehydration, baking, and rotisserie cooking if you won't use them often. That said, a "keep warm" function is useful. It will keep your food hot and crispy until you're ready to serve it.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features + Specs								
			Controls	Noise	Cleaning	Measured capacity (qt.)	Recorded temp when set to 350°F	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Weight (lb.)	Claimed capacity (qt.)	Wattage	Digital display	Dishwasher-safe	Programmed settings
AIR FRYERS														
Dash Tasti-Crisp DCAF260	81	$60	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	2.4	340	11x9x11	6	2.6	1,000	●	●	
Crux 17796	81	$100	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	3.7	322	12x10x14	7	3.7	1,300	●	●	●
Instant Vortex Plus 140-3079-01	79	$130	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	3.0	324	11x10x13	9	4.0	1,600	●	●	●
Tabitha Brown for Target 8 Qt. Digital	79	$70	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	7.0	341	13x12x15	10	8.0	1,750	●	●	●
Chefman Accufry RJ38-SQPF-5T2P-W	79	$100	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	4.5	322	13x11x14	7	5.0	1,300	●	●	●
Instant Vortex Plus 140-3089-01	79	$130	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	5.2	332	13x12x16	14	6.0	1,700	●	●	●
Cosori Dual Blaze CAF-P583S-KUS Smart	79	$180	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	4.7	363	14x12x15	14	6.8	1,750	●	●	●
Cosori Lite CAF-LI211	79	$60	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	1.7	335	11x9x10	5	2.1	900	●	●	●
Pioneer Woman PW6136170192004	78	$80	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	6.7	332	14x13x16	12	6.3	1,700	●	●	●
NuWave Brio Plus 37401	78	$130	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	7.1	357	13x12x16	12	8.0	1,800	●		●
Typhur Dome AF03	77	$500	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	5.0	353	10x15x21	22	5.6	1,750	●	●	●
Williams Sonoma Open Kitchen 60068	77	$100	I	⌃⌃	⌃	3.6	338	13x11x14	11	4.3	1,500	●	●	●
Cosori Lite CAF-LI401S Smart	77	$100	⌃⌃	I	⌃⌃	3.6	347	13x11x13	10	4.0	1,500	●	●	●
Frigidaire FRAFM100B	76	$130	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	5.6	337	12x13x16	11	4.5	1,500	●	●	●
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19089	76	$140	⌃	I	⌃⌃	7.6	313	14x17x15	16	9.0	1,700	●	●	●
Gourmia GAF414	76	$50	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	2.8	349	12x10x14	9	4.0	1,300	●	●	●
T-fal Easy Fry XXL EY705D51	76	$150	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	3.9	328	13x13x17	13	5.9	1,750	●		●
Cuisinart AIR-200	75	$150	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.9	331	13x12x17	12	6.0	1,800	●	●	●
Dash Tasti-Crisp Ceramic DCAF26CM	75	$60	I	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	2.3	345	11x9x11	6	2.6	1,000	●		
Instant Vortex Slim 140-3100-01	75	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.9	346	12x11x18	11	6.0	1,700	●	●	●
Sur La Table Kitchen Essentials 5 qt.	74	$50	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	4.4	347	11x9x16	10	5.0	1,500	●	●	●
GoWise USA GW22731	73	$100	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	I	4.9	334	14x12x15	12	5.8	1,700	●	●	●
Ovente FAD61302 Digital	73	$100	⌃	⌃	⌃	2.9	363	13x11x14	11	3.2	1,400	●	●	●
Bella Pro Series 90174	73	$80	⌃	⌃	⌃	3.4	349	12x10x13	8	4.2	1,500	●	●	●
Oster DiamondForce CKSTAFLC-DM	73	$80	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.8	323	13x12x15	12	5.0	1,700	●	●	●
Fritaire 209031	73	$200	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	4.7	329	12x14x11	11	5.0	1,500	●		●
Proctor Silex 35060	73	$100	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	4.9	324	14x15x13	10	5.5	1,700			●
Cosori TurboBlaze CAF-DC601-KUS	72	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃	4.5	332	12x12x15	12	6.0	1,725	●	●	●
Dash Express Tasti-Crisp DCAF120	72	$45	I	⌃⌃	⌃	2.4	348	11x9x11	6	2.6	1,000		●	
Kenmore KKAF8Q	72	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	6.3	337	14x12x15	13	8.0	1,700	●	●	●

PHOTOS, PREVIOUS SPREAD: MANUFACTURERS (PRODUCTS), GETTY IMAGES (COUNTER, TOAST), SHUTTERSTOCK (BERRIES, WALL). PHOTOS, FACING PAGE: DASH (PRODUCT), SHUTTERSTOCK (WINGS), GETTY IMAGES (NAPKIN, COUNTER, BACKGROUND)

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results			Features + Specs								
			Controls	Noise	Cleaning	Measured capacity (qt.)	Recorded temp when set to 350° F	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Weight (lb.)	Claimed capacity (qt.)	Wattage	Digital display	Dishwasher-safe	Programmed settings
AIR FRYERS *Continued*														
Dreo Pro DR-KAF002	72	$90	▲	▲	▲	3.4	323	12x10x13	8	4.0	1,500	●	●	●
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19038	72	$70	▲	▲	▲	5.3	333	13x12x15	11	6.0	1,750	●	●	
Philips Essential XL HD9270/91	71	$180	▲	▲	▲	4.3	339	12x13x16	13	6.2 L	1,700	●	●	●
Black+Decker Purifry AFBD62-0BD	71	$80	!	▲	▲▲	5.2	347	12x11x14	9	6.0	1,500	●	●	●
Elite Gourmet EAF5317D	70	$80	▲	▲	▲	3.8	334	13x11x13	8	5.3	1,350	●	●	●
Bella Pro Series Slim 90190	70	$70	!	▲	▲▲	3.7	346	11x8x15	7	4.0	1,300	●	●	●
Dash Clear View DVAF700GB	70	$80	!	▲▲	▲	6.0	359	13x12x15	10	7.0	1,500	●		●
Zwilling Enfinigy 1024869	70	$100	!	▲	▲▲	3.3	342	12x14x12	9	4.2	1,400	●	●	●
Philips 3000 Series NA351/00	70	$200	!	▲	▲▲	7.4	345	13x17x14	17	9.5	1,800	●	●	●
Crux Marshmello 17501	69	$80	▲	▲	▲	7.2	335	13x13x15	10	8.0	1,750	●	●	●
Kalorik Vivid FT52333SS	69	$140	▲	▲	▲	5.4	331	13x12x16	12	7.0	1,500	●	●	●
Crux Marshmello 17499	69	$50	▲	!	▲	3.0	333	11x9x12	6	3.0	1,300	●	●	●
Dash Deluxe DFAF455GB	69	$100	▲	▲	!	5.6	355	14x13x15	12	6.0	1,700		●	
West Bend AFWB7QBK13	69	$80	!	▲	▲▲	6.1	315	13x12x15	11	7.0	1,700	●	●	●
Salton AF2103	68	$120	!	▲	▲▲	6.6	315	14x13x15	12	8.5	1,700	●	●	●
Cuisinart AIR-160	68	$120	!	▲	▲▲	3.5	337	11x11x16	9	5.3	1,600	●	●	●
Ninja Foodi DZ550	68	$250	▲	!	▲	7.4	365	13x17x15	19	10.0	1,690	●	●	●
Instant Vortex Plus 140-3118-01	68	$120	▲	!	▲	6.1	339	13x16x15	18	8.0	1,700	●	●	●
Paris Hilton PH11921	68	$80	!	▲	▲▲	5.7	328	12x11x14	10	6.0	1,700	●	●	●
Ninja Foodi 2-Basket DZ201	68	$200	▲	!	▲	6.0	336	12x16x14	18	8.0	1,690	●	●	●
National NA-3001AF	68	$55	!	▲	▲	1.7	315	11x9x11	5	2.1	1,000		●	
Gourmia GAF826	67	$120	!	▲	▲	7.2	351	14x12x15	12	8.0	1,700	●	●	●
Saki Smart HF-8350DT	67	$90	▲	!	▲▲	3.4	315	12x10x14	8	4.7	1,500	●	●	●
Ninja Foodi FlexBasket DZ071	67	$180	▲	!	▲	4.9	341	11x18x12	17	7.0	1,690	●	●	●
Pioneer Woman PW8402294814	67	$90	▲	▲	▲	4.6	348	12x11x15	11	5.8	1,500	●	●	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/airfryers**.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score is based on controls, noise, and ease of cleaning. For **controls,** our engineers judge how intuitive it is to use the appliance's buttons, dials, or digital display, and how clear the lettering or other markings are. For **noise,** testers use a sound-level meter to measure how loud each air fryer is when it's being operated. For **cleaning,** testers evaluate how easy it is to clean each model's basket, interior, and exterior.

MICROWAVES

They're an essential piece of equipment in most kitchens. The best models are efficient and easy to use and can do everything from quick reheating to more advanced functions. They can cook a frozen meal quickly, defrost a pound of ground beef evenly, bake potatoes, pop a bag of popcorn with the touch of a button, and much, much more.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** If you have the room, a larger microwave (one with a claimed capacity of 1.3 cubic feet or more, like the top-rated Panasonic NN-SD77PS for $360) will give you the best performance and more features.

Many large models have sensor cooking—they do the work of figuring out how long something needs to cook—as well as multiple power levels and inverter technology, which can promote consistent heating. All of those features (and higher wattage) mean they can heat meals faster and more evenly.

But be sure to measure the space you have on your countertop before you buy. Microwaves can vary by several inches not only in width and depth but also in height. Plus, you'll want to have a clearance of a few inches around it.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** We find that many small microwaves (those with a claimed capacity of 0.8 cubic feet or less) are underpowered, meaning they take longer to heat food and can produce uneven results. The small microwaves we've tested run on 700 watts; all of the models we recommend have power levels between 1,050 and 1,250 watts. Also, you won't be able to fit more than a small bowl or a single slice of pizza in a microwave of that size, so consider something larger unless you're cooking for one.

PHOTO: LG

LARGE COUNTERTOP MICROWAVE

LG NeoChef MSER1590S $240

82 OVERALL SCORE

And don't rely solely on a manufacturer's claim about the capacity of a microwave you're thinking about buying. We calculate capacity based on usable space, which doesn't include corners in models with turntables unless the turntables can be turned off.

EXPERT TIP

"Sensor reheat is my favorite feature. You just program in what you want to warm up and the sensor makes sure the food is heated to the perfect level."

KELLY MOOMEY
Senior Market Analyst

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Heating evenness	Defrosting evenness	Speed of heating	Noise	Ease of use	Control type	Usable capacity (cu. ft.)	Wattage	Turntable size (in.)	Exterior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Convection mode	Sensor	Speed-cook mode
SMALL COUNTERTOP MICROWAVES																	
Commercial Chef CHM770B	70	$85	–	–	⏫	➖	⏬	🔼	➖	Touchscreen	0.4	700	9.6	10x18x13			
Danby DDMW007501G1	62	$120	🔼	⏬	🔼	🔼	🔽	🔼	➖	Touchscreen	0.4	700	9.6	10x18x13			
Farberware Classic FMO07ABTBKA	58	$85	➖	🔽	➖	⏫	⏬	⏫	🔼	Touchscreen	0.4	700	10.0	10x17x13			
Magic Chef HMM770B	54	$50	🔼	⏬	🔽	⏫	⏬	⏫	➖	Touchscreen	0.4	700	10	10x17x13			
Black+Decker EM720CPN-P	53	$80	🔼	⏬	🔽	🔼	⏬	⏫	🔼	Touchscreen	0.4	700	10	10x17x14			
Open Kitchen by Williams Sonoma Stainless-Steel Microwave	52	$100	–	–	🔽	⏫	⏬	⏫	➖	Touchscreen	0.4	700	10	10x17x13			
GE GCST07N1WBB	49	$105	➖	🔽	🔽	🔼	⏬	⏫	➖	Touchscreen	0.4	700	10	10x17x13		●	
Ikea Tillreda 404.934.20	43	$60	🔽	🔽	➖		⏬	⏫	🔽	Dial	0.4	700	9.9	10x17x14			

⏬ 🔽 ➖ 🔼 ⏫ WORSE – BETTER | ✔ CR RECOMMENDED

MIDSIZED COUNTERTOP MICROWAVES

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results: Predicted reliability	Survey Results: Owner satisfaction	Test Results: Heating evenness	Test Results: Defrosting evenness	Test Results: Speed of heating	Test Results: Noise	Test Results: Ease of use	Features + Specs: Control type	Usable capacity (cu. ft.)	Wattage	Turntable size (in.)	Exterior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Convection mode	Sensor	Speed-cook mode
✓ **Panasonic** NN-SN67HS	81	$145	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	Touchscreen	0.7	1,200	13	12x20x16		●	
Commercial Chef CHM990B	74	$95	–	–	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	900	10.6	11x19x14			
Breville Smooth Wave BMO850BSS1BUC1	74	$400	▲▲	▲▲	▼	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Dial, button	0.7	1,250	12.5	13x21x18		●	
GE JES1109RRSS	73	$190	●	▼	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	Dial	0.6	1,050	12.4	12x21x17	●		●
Commercial Chef CHCM11100W	71	$110	–	–	●	▲	●	▲	●	Touchscreen	0.7	1,000	12.4	12x21x16			
Vissani HVM1110B	68	$120	▲▲	▼▼	▼	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.3	12x21x15			
Galanz GSWWD11S1S10	67	$95	●	▼	▲	●	●	▲	▲	Touchscreen, dial	0.7	1,000	12.2	12x21x16		●	
Black+Decker EM925AAK-P00A	65	$90	▲	▼▼	●	●	▼	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.5	900	10.6	11x19x16			
Vissani VSCMWE11S2W-10	64	$130	▲▲	▼▼	▼	●	●	▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.3	11x21x17			
Cuisinart EM0P042DG	63	$70	▲▲	●	▼	▲▲	●	▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.4	12x21x15			
GE JES1095SMSS	62	$125	●	▼	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.5	900	10.6	11x19x15			
Danby DDMW1061BSS-6	61	$220	▲	▼▼	●	▲	▼	▲	▲	Touch/dial	0.7	1,000	12.4	13x20x20	●		●
Mainstays (Walmart) MS8436193153-03	61	$75	●	▼	●	▲	●	▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.4	12x21x15			
Cuisinart EC034AL7-S1	61	$130	▲▲	●	▼	▲	●	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.7	1,000	12.4	12x20x18	●		●
Panasonic HomeChef NN-CD87KS	60	$515	●	▲	●	●	●	▲	▲	Dial, button	0.8	1,000	14	14x22x18	●	●	●
Toshiba ML2-EM31PASS	58	$120	●	●	●	▼	●	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.5	12x20x17			
Danby DBMW0925BBS	57	$120	▲	▼▼	▼	▲▲	▼	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.5	900	10.6	11x18x13			
LG MSER0990S	57	$180	●	●	▼	▲▲	●	▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.5	1,000	11.4	11x18x14			
Black+Decker EM031M2CE	56	$90	▲	▼▼	●	▼	●	▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.5	12x20x16			
Sharp SMC0912BS	56	$120	●	●	▼	●	▼	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.5	900	10.6	11x19x16			
GE JES1145SHSS	56	$110	●	▼	●	▼	●	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	950	12.4	12x21x16			
Farberware FMO11AHTBKB	55	$110	●	▼	●	▼	●	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.5	12x20x17			
Toshiba ML2-EM25PABS	55	$120	●	●	●	●	▼	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.5	900	10.6	12x19x16			
Danby DBMW1126BBS	54	$140	▲	▼▼	▼	▲	●	▲▲	●	Touchscreen	0.6	900	12.4	12x20x15			
Whirlpool WMC30309LS	53	$140	▼	▼▼	▲	●	●	▲	●	Touchscreen	0.6	900	10.6	11x19x17			
Avanti MT116V4M	52	$150	●	▼▼	▼	●	▼	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	1,000	12.4	12x20x17			
Breville Compact Wave BMO650SIL1BUC1	52	$250	▲▲	▲▲	▼	▼	▼	▲▲	●	Touch/dial	0.5	900	10.6	12x19x17			
Breville Combi Wave BMO870BSS1BUC1	51	$450	▲▲	▲▲	▼	●	▼	▲▲	▲	Dial, button	0.7	1,100	12.4	12x20x21	●		●
Whirlpool WMC30311B	49	$150	▼	▼▼	●	●	●	▲	●	Touchscreen	0.7	900	12.3	12x22x16			
GE Profile PEM31SFSS	33	$480	●	▼	▼▼	▲	▼	▲▲	▲	Touchscreen	0.6	800	10.5	12x24x14		●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results					Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Heating evenness	Defrosting evenness	Speed of heating	Noise	Ease of use	Control type	Usable capacity (cu. ft.)	Wattage	Turntable size (in.)	Exterior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Convection mode	Sensor	Speed-cook mode
LARGE COUNTERTOP MICROWAVES																	
✓ **Panasonic** NN-SD77PS	83	$360								Dial, button	0.9	1,250	14.9	12x22x19		●	
✓ **LG** NeoChef MSER1590S	82	$240								Touchscreen	0.8	1,200	14.2	12x21x17		●	
✓ **Panasonic** NN-SE785S	79	$420								Touchscreen	0.9	1,250	14.9	12x22x19		●	
✓ **Vissani** EC042A2KJ	79	$200								Touchscreen	0.8	1,000	13.5	13x22x22	●	●	●
✓ **Panasonic** NN-SD975S	78	$400								Dial, button	1.4	1,250	16.5	14x24x20		●	
✓ **Panasonic** NN-SN97HS	78	$280								Touchscreen	1.4	1,250	16.5	14x24x19		●	
✓ **GE** Profile JES2251SJ	75	$320								Touchscreen	1.4	1,200	16.5	14x24x19		●	
✓ **Panasonic** NN-SC73LS	74	$220								Touchscreen	0.9	1,200	13.5	13x22x18		●	
Vissani VSCMWE16S2SW-11	73	$180								Touchscreen	0.9	1,100	12.3	12x22x20		●	
LG NeoChef MSER2090S	72	$260								Touchscreen	1.2	1,200	16	14x24x19		●	
Farberware FMO22ABTBKC	70	$200								Touchscreen	1.3	1,200	16.5	14x24x20		●	
Commercial Chef CHM16MW6	69	$170	–	–						Touchscreen	0.9	1,000	13.5	13x22x18		●	
GE JES2051SNSS	68	$310								Touchscreen	1.2	1,200	16	14x24x20		●	
GE JES1657SMSS	68	$180								Touchscreen	0.9	1,150	13.5	13x22x18		●	
Sharp SMC1662DS	68	$180								Touchscreen	0.9	1,100	13.5	13x22x18		●	
Danby Designer DDMW01440WG1	67	$170								Touchscreen	0.8	1,000	12.4	12x22x18			
Panasonic NN-SD69LS	66	$200								Dial/button	0.7	1,100	12.75	12x21x18		●	
Panasonic NN-SV79MS	65	$285								Dial/button	0.7	1,200	12.3	13x20x17		●	
Galanz GSWWD14S2S11	65	$130								Touchscreen, dial	0.8	1,100	12.5	12x22x19		●	
Commercial Chef CHM16100B6C	65	$175	–	–						Touchscreen	0.8	1,000	12.4	12x22x19			
Cuisinart 072-01-9916	61	$110								Touchscreen	0.7	1,000	12.4	12x20x18			
Café CEB515P3NDS	59	$980								Touchscreen	0.8	1,000	13.5	13x22x21	●	●	●
Panasonic NN-SC668S	59	$120								Touchscreen	0.7	1,200	12.4	13x20x16			
Cuisinart EM136ALQ-PVH	57	$100								Touchscreen	0.7	1,100	12.4	13x20x17		●	
Sharp SMC1452CH	52	$170								Touchscreen	0.6	1,100	12.4	12x20x19		●	
Commercial Chef CHM14110B6C	46	$195	–	–						Touchscreen	0.8	1,100	12.8	12x22x18			

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/microwaves.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines performance results with survey data for **predicted reliability** (the likelihood of model to develop problems or break within the first four years) and **owner satisfaction** (the proportion of members extremely likely to recommend the microwave they bought). A gray dash (–) indicates insufficient data.

Performance includes **heating evenness,** tested by reheating cold mashed potatoes and taking temperature readings at several points; **defrosting evenness,** based on how well the auto-defrost program defrosts a pound of ground beef; **speed of heating,** which reflects how quickly water heats up; **noise,** based on how quiet a model is on the high setting; and **ease of use,** or how intuitive it is to operate.

WORSE – BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED

TOASTER OVENS

Today's versatile toaster ovens can bake, broil, reheat, and even cook a whole chicken or a small sheet-pan meal. Some also have an air-fry setting to dial up the crispiness of wings or fries. Another reason to love countertop ovens is that they use as little as one-third the energy of a full-sized oven. So if you cook for a small household, it could save you a little money vs. using your range. (And it won't heat up your kitchen as much on a hot day, either.)

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Start by thinking about what you like to cook. If you make toast regularly, check our ratings for excellent scores in our one-slice and full-batch tests, which assess how evenly an oven browns single or multiple slices of bread. The GE G9OAAASSPSS, $220, is one option. If you love frozen pizzas, look for a model with greater width and depth to make sure they'll fit. Ovens in our ratings can fit pies from 9 to 13 inches. Want to roast a chicken or broil a thick pork chop? Look for top-notch baking performance and a wide temperature range (most ovens can reach 450° F). Some larger models, such as the Ninja DCT401, $250, also have double oven spaces so you can make two dishes at once.

The most expensive toaster ovens, especially feature-packed options from brand names like Breville and Wolf, can cost as much as $600. But you can get a model that's easy to use and easy to clean, and does a great job of toasting and baking for less than $200. Note that some models take up significant real estate on a countertop, so compare the dimensions to the measurements of your space.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** A higher price doesn't always mean a better score in our tests, and no toaster oven in our ratings has excellent scores across the board, so consider performance on the tasks that are most important to you. And bear in mind that not a single toaster oven received an excellent score for reheating.

EXPERT TIP

"Consider size carefully. Some toaster ovens can only fit four slices of bread, while others can handle a 12-inch pizza. If you plan to use it for more than toast, look for models with convection for added versatility."

KENNETH SUTTON
Test Leader

TOASTER OVEN
Ninja DCT401
$250

69 OVERALL SCORE

PHOTO: NINJA

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features + Specs				
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Reheat	Baking	Color range	Toasting time	Full batch	One slice	Ease of cleaning	Ease of use	Wattage	Temperature range (°F)	Warranty	Exterior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Convection oven
TOASTER OVENS																	
Hamilton Beach 31156	71	$105											1,450	Min-450	1 yr.	10.1x17.6x11.5	
Ninja DCT401	69	$250											1,800	100-450	1 yr.	13.3x18.7x17.4	●
Breville The Smart Oven BOV800XL	68	$270											1,800	120-450	1 yr.	11.7x18.5x15.5	●
KitchenAid KCO255BM	68	$280											1,800	80-450	1 yr.	13.5x18.25x19.5	●
GE G9OAAASSPSS	67	$220											1,500	85-450	1 yr.	13.9x16.9x17.2	●

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features + Specs				
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Reheat	Baking	Color range	Toasting time	Full batch	One slice	Ease of cleaning	Ease of use	Wattage	Temperature range (°F)	Warranty	Exterior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Convection oven
TOASTER OVENS *Continued*																	
✓ **KitchenAid** KCO124BM	66	$220	▲	●	▲	●	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	1,800	150-450	1 yr.	11.5x16.7x18.5	●
✓ **Breville** The Smart Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV900BSSUSC	66	$400	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	▼	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	1,800	80-480	2 yr.	13x21.1x16.8	●
✓ **Gourmia** GTF7900	66	$100	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	1,700	90-450	1 yr.	11.7x17.3x11.5	●
✓ **Wolf** Elite WGCO150S	65	$750	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	1,800	80-450	5 yr.	12.5x22.5x16.5	●
Breville The Smart Oven Air Fryer BOV860BSS1BUS1	64	$350	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	1,800	120-450	2 yr.	11.1x18.7x16	●
Emeril Power AirFryer 360 S-AFO-001	63	$170	▲▲	●	●	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▼▼	▲	▲▲	1,500	120-400	60 days	10.5x19x15.25	●
Breville The Joule Oven Air Fryer Pro BOV950BST1BUS1	63	$550	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	▼	▲	●	▲	▲▲	1,800	80-480	2 yr.	12.9x21.3x17.2	●
Black+Decker Crisp 'N Bake TO1785SG	63	$80	●	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼	▲▲	●	1,150	Warm-450	2 yr.	8.75x15.5x11.25	
Ninja Foodi XL Pro DT201	63	$300	▲▲	▲▲	▼	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	1,800	85-450	1 yr.	13.5x17.25x20.5	●
Hamilton Beach Easy View XL 31460	63	$80	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▼	▲	●	1,760	Min-450	1 yr.	11.9x18.2x10.8	●
Breville The Compact Smart Oven BOV650XL	63	$190	▲	▲▲	▼	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	1,800	120-450	1 yr.	10.2x16.5x15.9	
KitchenAid KCO128	63	$280	▲	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	1,800	75-450	1 yr.	11.5x16.8x17.5	●
Panasonic FlashXpress NB-G110P	62	$170	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▼	1,300	250-500	1 yr.	10.2x13.5x12.2	
GE Profile P9OIAAS6TBB	62	$450	●	●	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▼▼	▲▲	▲▲	1,800	170-500	1 yr.	17x17.3x19.8	●
Breville The Mini Smart Oven BOV450XL	62	$160	▲	▲▲	▼	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	1,800	120-450	1 yr.	9x15.8x14.3	
Hamilton Beach 31143	62	$65	▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼▼	▲	▲▲	1,100	Warm-450	5 yr.	8.25x15x12.25	
Kenmore KKTOAF25SS	61	$200	–	–	●	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲	1,700	120-450	2 yr.	12.2x19.5x16	●
Gourmia GTF2440	61	$90	▲▲	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▼▼	▲▲	▲	1,700	90-450	1 yr.	11.5x17.2x14.3	●
Breville The Smart Oven Pro BOV845BSS	60	$280	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	●	●	▼	▲	▲	1,800	120-500	1 yr.	11.2xx18.5x16.4	●
KitchenAid KCO224BM	60	$300	▲	●	●	▲	▼	▼	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	1,800	90-450	1 yr.	13.2x18.3x18.5	●
Zojirushi Micom ET-ZLC30	60	$230	–	–	▲	▼	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	1,535	140-450	6 mo.		
Cuisinart TOA-65	60	$300	●	●	▲	●	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	▲	1,800	100-450	3 yr.	13.75x15.75x15.5	●
Hamilton Beach 31225	60	$130	▲	●	●	▲	▼	▲	▼	▲▲	▲	▲	1,800	Min-450	1 yr.	12.75x17.5x16	●
Our Place Wonder Oven	59	$195	–	–	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▼	1,400	200-450	1 yr.	12.1x11.5x13.1	
Cuisinart Chef's Convection TOB-260N1	59	$300	●	●	●	▲	▲▲	▼	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	1,800	175-500	3 yr.	11.2x20.9x16.8	●
Cosori Deluxe XLS CS130-CFH Smart	59	$200	–	–	●	●	▲▲	▼	▲	●	▲▲	▲	1,800	80-450	2 yr.	12.3x20.1x17.5	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/toasters.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines performance test results with survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction.** Findings are from CR's 2021 Summer and 2024 Winter quarterly surveys. Our **reheat** test measures how evenly a toaster oven reheats foods by inserting thermocouples into reheated lasagna. The **baking** test assesses evenness when making corn muffins and cookies. **Color range** indicates how well a model produces a range of light to dark toast. **Toasting time** reflects how long it takes to toast a full batch at a medium setting. The **full batch** test reflects color evenness of all slices in a batch toasted at the medium setting. **One slice** tests analyze how well a slice of bread can be toasted to medium-brown. **Ease of cleaning** reflects the effort needed to clean the exterior and crumb tray. **Ease of use** factors in the clarity of the controls and how easy they are to set.

TOASTERS

The best models do one thing very well: They turn out evenly browned, perfectly crisp toast time after time. They do this better than any toaster oven, so if you mainly want an appliance for this reason—or to make the occasional frozen waffle or toaster pastry—a simple pop-up is your best bet. But just because these are straightforward machines doesn't mean any one will do. Models in our full ratings range from $10 to $480, with designs from timeless to high-tech, digital displays, and WiFi connectivity. Some have wide slots to accommodate bagels; others, just one to fit long slices of artisanal bread. One model we tested even has a window so that you can watch your toast brown.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** The least expensive toasters may have a plastic casing, a simple setting dial, and a lever to lower your bread. Pricier models are more often made of stainless steel and have buttons, switches, and sliders for settings. The good news is you can find a toaster that performs very well no matter what your budget is.

Golden? A rich brown? If you're picky about how your toast should look, seek a model with a slider that clicks into place at your desired color—or better yet, a digital display that confirms your setting onscreen (the Cuisinart CPT-415 Countdown Metal 2-Slice, $60, has this), or a clear view of your toast (as on the model shown at right). If you tend to set it and forget it, an audible signal that your toast is ready will help you retrieve it while it's hot.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** If all you want is nicely toasted bread, you can skip all the bells and whistles. Some of the simplest and least expensive toasters in our ratings showed excellent performance in our color-range tests.

2-SLICE TOASTER

Dash Clear View DVTS501GY $50

85 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"Consider a model with a look-and-lift feature—or even a viewing window—that allows you to check on toasting progress without interrupting the toast cycle."

LISA KEON, Senior Tester

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs			
			Color range	Full batch	One slice	Ease of use	Ease of cleaning	Toasting time	Controls	Exterior material	Exterior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Slot dimensions, LxWxD (in.)
4-SLICE TOASTERS												
✓ **Breville** Die Cast Smart Toaster BTA840XL 4-Slice	84	$210	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	Button, lever	M	8x11x12	5.5x1.5x5.6
✓ **Haden** Brighton 75077 4-Slice	81	$80	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	Button, dial, lever	M	8x12x12	5.5x1.4x4.5
Wolf Gourmet WGTR154S 4-Slice	80	$480	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	Button, dial	S	8x13x12	6.1x1.6x5.5
Wolf Gourmet WGTR104S 4-Slice	75	$480	⏫	🔼	❗	🔼	⏫	🔼	Button, dial	P, S	8x13x12	6.2x1.6x5
Cuisinart CPT-142 Compact Plastic 4-Slice	73	$50	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	❗	🔼	Button, dial	P	8x11x11	5.4x1.4x5
Haden Cotswold 75009 4-Slice	73	$70	⏫	⏫	❗	🔼	❗	❗	Button, dial, lever	M	8x12x11	6x1.4x5
Elite Gourmet ECT-3100 4-Slice	72	$70	⏫	⏫	⏬	❗	❗	⏫	Button, dial	P, S	8x15x7	10x1.3x4.5
Haden Cotswold 75100 4-Slice	72	$90	⏫	🔼	🔼	❗	⏫	🔼	Button, dial	M	8x13x13	5.5x1.5x4.9

PHOTO: DASH

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs			
			Color range	Full batch	One slice	Ease of use	Ease of cleaning	Toasting time	Controls	Exterior material	Exterior dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Slot dimensions, LxWxD (in.)
2-SLICE TOASTERS												
Breville A Bit More BTA720XL 2-Slice	92	$90							Button, slide	S	8x8x11	5.8x1.5x5.3
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19039	91	$40							Touch button	M	8x7x11	5.3x1.5x4.9
Breville Die Cast Smart Toaster BTA820XL 2-Slice	90	$160							Button, lever	P	8x7x12	5.6x1.5x5.2
Cuisinart CPT-520 2-Slice	88	$80							Button, digital display, lever	M	8x7x11	5.4x1.4x4.7
Cuisinart CPT-415 Countdown Metal 2-Slice	87	$60							Button	M	8x10x7	6x2x5
Revolution InstaGLO R180 Smart 2-Slice	86	$350							Touchscreen	P, S	9x7x12	5.4x1.4x4
Breville the Toast Select Luxe BTA735BSS1BUS1 2-Slice	86	$200							Button, dial	S	8x9x14	5.5x1.3x5.9
Dash Clear View DVTS501GY 2-Slice	85	$50							Button, dial	P, G	8x16x7	10.5x1.5x4.9
Cuisinart CPT-122 Compact Plastic 2-Slice	85	$30							Button, dial	P	7x11x8	6x1x5
Lenox Butterfly Meadow 894541 2-Slice	85	$90							Button, dial	M	8x6x11	5.3x1.5x5
Chefman Smart Touch RJ31-SS-T 2-Slice	84	$60							Digital display, touchscreen	S	7x7x11	5.5x1.5x5.5
Haden Heritage 75027 2-Slice	84	$65							Button, dial	P, S	8x8x12	5.5x1.5x5
Hamilton Beach 22910 2-Slice	84	$25							Button, dial	S	8x7x12	5.5x1.5x4.8
Krups My Memory KH320D50 2-Slice	83	$50							Button	P, S	8x7x11	5.4x1.4x5
Kenmore 133110 2-Slice	83	$50							Button, dial, lever	M	8x7x11	5.5x1.5x4.2
Hamilton Beach Gourmet 22996 2-Slice	83	$30							Button, dial	P, M	8x7x12	6.5x1.5x5.25
Krups KH732D50 2-Slice	83	$60							Button, dial	P, S	8x7x12	5.7x1.4x5
Russell Hobbs TRL9300GYR Glass Accent 2-Slice	82	$45							Button	S	8x5x15	10x1.6x5.3
Hamilton Beach 22999 2-Slice	81	$25							Button, dial	M	8x5x16	10x1.4x5
Café Express Finish C9TMA2S3PD3 2-Slice	81	$130							Button, dial	P	8x7x13	5.5x1.4x5
Black+Decker TR3500SD 2-Slice	81	$40							Button, dial	P, S	8x7x10	5.5x1.4x4.8
Ninja Foodi Flip ST101 2-Slice	81	$130							Digital display, lever, touch button	M	9x17x7	9.7x2x6
Kate Spade All In Good Taste 888394 2-Slice	80	$70							Button, dial	S	8x6x11	5.4x1.5x5.3
KitchenAid KMT2109 2-Slice	79	$140							Button, lever	M	8x7x12	5.6x1.6x5.25
KitchenAid Pro Line KMT2203 2-Slice	79	$300							Button lever	M	9x14x7	6x2x5

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/toasters.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score reflects how well a toaster browns slices of bread, how long it takes to toast, and how easy it is to clean. Our **color range** assessment shows how well a toaster produces toast ranging from very light to very dark. **Full batch** tests assess the color evenness of all slices in a batch on the toaster's medium setting; **one slice** tests determine how well a single slice of bread is toasted to a medium-brown. **Ease of use** reflects how clear the controls and markings are and how easy they are to set. **Ease of cleaning** evaluates how easy it is to clean the toaster's exterior and the crumb tray. **Toasting time** measures how long it takes to toast a full batch at the medium setting.

WORSE – BETTER | CR RECOMMENDED | CR SMART BUY

Fast & Easy Prep Tools

Getting ingredients ready can be even more time-consuming than cooking itself, especially if you're slicing and dicing manually. But you can give your hands a break—and get to your sautéing, baking, and air-frying sooner—with the right blender, mixer, or food processor.

FULL-SIZED BLENDER
Vitamix 5200
$500
84 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"If you like to add one ingredient at a time while you're blending, look for a model with a filler cap."

TYLER IVESTER
Senior Tester

BLENDERS

Many of today's blenders go beyond whipping and puréeing to tackle food-processor-type tasks such as chopping, dicing, and grating. Some will even heat up what you're mixing or blend your smoothie directly into a single-serving cup you can take on the go.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** A full-sized blender can handle a big batch of salsa or soup and crush enough ice for a pitcher of frozen drinks. If you plan to use your machine primarily for smoothies, look for a model with top scores in our icy drinks tests, and pick one that comes with a to-go cup (and/or a personal blender attachment) in addition to its full-sized jar. A removable blade can make cleaning easier. The Ninja Professional Plus Kitchen System BN801, $220, has all three—plus a food chopper.

If you often make hot soups, you may want a model with a heating feature. Vitamix blenders and the Wolf Gourmet High Performance WGBL100S for $400 (the only Wolf blender in our ratings) can make hot soups using heat from the friction of the blender blades.

If you have limited counter space, you might consider a personal blender instead. While none of the ones we've tested achieved an excellent Overall Score, several performed very well in our smoothie, purée, and ice crush tests—and they take up less space than full-sized models. They're also lighter to handle and less cumbersome to put in a drawer or cabinet when you're not using it.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Glass blender jars can be heavy. If you have limited hand or arm strength, you might want to choose a model with a plastic jar. Glass jars do hold up better in the dishwasher, however.

And make sure to avoid an underpowered blender. While there are exceptions, the blenders that land at the top of our ratings are the ones that draw 1,380 watts or more.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs							
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Icy drinks (smoothies)	Convenience	Purée	Ice crush	Noise	Durability	Jar material	Wattage	Capacity	Speeds	Weight (lb.)	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Removable blade	Personal blender attachment
FULL-SIZED BLENDERS																		
✓ **Vitamix** Professional Series 750	86	$700	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	12A	8.0	10	13	18x8x10		
✓ **Wolf** Gourmet High Performance WGBL100S	85	$400	⇈	^	⇈	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,545	8.0	11	13	18x8x10		
✓ **Vitamix** 5200	84	$500	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,380	8.0	Var.	11	20x8x9		
✓ **Vitamix** Ascent X2	83	$550	⇈	⇈	^	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,440	6.0	10	11	17x8x10		
✓ **Vitamix** Ascent Series A3500	82	$700	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,440	8.0	15	15	17x8x11		
✓ **Vitamix** Ascent X5	82	$750	⇈	⇈	^	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,440	6.0	10	14	17x8x10		
✓ **Vitamix** A3500 Stainless Steel Container	82	$750	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	SS	12A	6.0	14	15	17x8x11		
$ **Ninja** Professional Plus Kitchen System BN801	82	$220	^	^	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,400	9.0	5	9	18x8x10	●	●
✓ **Vitamix** Ascent A2500	82	$600	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	⇈	–	–	⇈	P	12A	8.0	13	12	17x8x11		
$ **NutriBullet** Smart Touch NBF50420	80	$200	^	–	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,500	8.0	7	9	18x8x9		
✓ **Cuisinart** Hurricane Pro 3.5 Peak HP CBT-2000	80	$400	^	–	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,500	8.0	10	11	18x9x11		
✓ **Breville** The Q BBL820SHY1BUS1	80	$400	–	^	⇈	⇈	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,800	8.0	9	12	18x8x11		
✓ **Breville** Super Q BBL920BSS1BUS1	78	$500	–	^	^	⇈	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,800	8.0	10	0	18x8x11		●
✓ **Kuvings** Vacuum SV500S	76	$650	–	–	^	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	1,700	5.0	Var.	12	18x9x11		
✓ **Vitamix** Explorian Series E310	75	$380	⇈	⇈	–	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	12A	6.0	10	9	18x8x9		
Ninja BL770	74	$200	^	^	^	⇈	^	^	⇊	⇈	P	1,500	9.0	4	9	18x8x10	●	●
Ninja Twisti High Speed Duo SS151	73	$120	^	^	^	^	⇈	–	⇊	⇈	P	1,600	4.2	6	6	14x7x7	●	●
Smeg Professional BLC01	73	$350	–	–	^	^	⇈	–	–	⇈	P	1,250	6.0	9	12	17x8x11		
Hamilton Beach 58600	72	$80	^	⇊	^	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	G	720	6.0	3	9	18x8x8	●	
PowerXL Smart Pro BL6018-1BP	72	$130	–	–	^	^	⇈	–	–	⇈	G	1,800	8.0	Var.	10	18x8x8		
Kenmore Elite KKEB1.3HSS	70	$220	–	–	^	–	⇈	–	–	⇈	P	1,000	8.0	5	8	17x9x9		●
Ninja BN701 Professional Plus With Auto iQ	70	$120	^	^	–	⇈	^	^	–	⇈	P	1,400	9.0	7	8	18x8x10	●	
Black+Decker Quiet With Cyclone Glass Jar BL1400DG-P	70	$65	^	⇊	^	^	^	–	–	⇈	G	492	8.0	6	8	17x8x8	●	
Breville The Fresh & Furious BBL620SIL	70	$200	–	^	^	⇈	⇈	–	–	⇈	P	1,100	6.0	8	9	18x8x9		
Hamilton Beach Commercial Tempest HBH650	70	$750	^	⇊	–	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	2,237	8.0	4	12	18x7x8		
Ninja Detect Power Blender Pro TB201	70	$140	^	^	^	⇈	^	–	–	⇈	P	1,800	8.0	10	8	18x9x9	●	
NuWave Infinity 28202	69	$250	–	–	–	^	⇈	^	–	⇈	P	2.5 hp	8.0	16	12	18x8x9		
Zwilling Enfinigy Power	69	$300	–	–	^	^	⇈	–	–	⇈	P	1,400	8.0	17	10	16x8x9		
Dash Chef Series Deluxe	69	$280	⇊	⇊	⇈	^	⇈	–	–	⇈	P	1,400	8.5	18	11	22x9x11		

PHOTOS: VITAMIX (PRODUCT), GETTY IMAGES (FRUIT), SHUTTERSTOCK (COUNTER, WALL)

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Icy drinks (smoothies)	Convenience	Purée	Ice crush	Noise	Durability	Wattage	Capacity	Speeds	Weight (lb.)	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Full-sized blender attachment
PERSONAL BLENDERS																
Ninja Professional Plus Kitchen System BN801 Personal	79	$220	▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	1,000	3	6	7	15x8x10	●
NutriBullet Original NBR-0801 Personal	78	$70	●	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	600	3	1	4	13.5x6x6	
Beast B10 Personal	78	$165	—	—	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲	1,000	3	1	7	16x5x5	
GE G8BCAASSPSS Personal	77	$120	—	—	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲	1,000	3	6	7	14x6x8	●
Ninja Twisti High Speed Duo SS151 Personal	77	$120	▲	●	▲▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	1,600	3	1	5	11x7x7	●
NutriBullet Pro 900 Personal	75	$90	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲	900	3	1	5	15x6x6	
Ninja BL770 Personal	74	$200	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	1,500	2	1	8	15x8x10	●
Cuisinart Velocity Ultra Trio BFP-650 Personal	74	$150	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	750	2	4	6	15x7x9	●
Calphalon 2099742 ActiveSense Personal	73	$135	●	▼	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	▲▲	900	3	8	7	17x7x7	●
Breville Super Q BBL920BSS1BUS1 Personal	72	$500	▲	▲	▲	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	1,800	3	10	4	18x8x11	●
NutriBullet Ultra NB50500	72	$150	●	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	●	▲▲	1,200	3	1	6	14.75x6x6	
NutriBullet NBF50500 Personal	71	$130	●	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	▼	▲▲	1,200	3	3	6		●
Zwilling Enfinigy 53100-901 Personal	67	$100	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▼	●	▲▲	500	3	1	5	14x6x6	
Magic Bullet MBF50200 Personal	67	$50	—	—	▲	▲	▲	▼	●	▲▲	600	2	2	4	14.5x7x7	●
Braun TriForce Power With Smoothie 2Go JB9041BK	66	$300	▲▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	1,600	3	17	9	15x8x11	●
Cuisinart Hurricane Compact CPB-380 Personal	66	$100	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	500	2	2	5	15x6x6	●
Ninja Nutri-Blender Pro BN401 Personal	66	$100	▲	●	●	▲	▲	▲	●	▲▲	1,000	2	3	5	15x7x8	
Tribest PBG-5050-A Glass Personal	65	$180	—	—	▲	▲	●	●	●	▲▲	276	2	3	5	14x6x8	
Cuisinart Soho CPB-7 Personal	65	$80	▲	●	●	▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	400	3	1	4	15x6x6	
Black+Decker Digital PowerCrush BL1300DG-P Personal	64	$60	▲▲	▼▼	●	▲	●	▲	●	▲▲	500	2	6	5	15x7x7	●
KitchenSmith 12034 Personal	60	$20	—	—	●	▲	▲	▼	●	▲▲	285	2	1	2	12x5x5	
Starfrit 024300 Personal	59	$35	—	—	●	▲	▲	●	●	▲▲	300	3	3	2	13x5x5	
Tribest Original PB-250-A Personal	59	$80	—	—	●	▲	●	▼	●	▲▲	200	1	1	3	13x5x6	

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/blenders**.

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines performance tests with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first four years of ownership. Findings are from CR's 2021 Summer and 2023 Fall quarterly surveys. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members extremely likely to recommend the blender they bought. When we have insufficient survey data, we indicate it with a gray dash (—). For our **icy drinks** score, we make batches of nonalcoholic piña coladas and use a series of sieves with diminishing mesh sizes to evaluate smoothness and thickness. An excellent score means these drinks have a smooth, consistent texture. **Convenience** reflects how easy it is to clean the blender base, remove and replace the blade, and use the controls, among other factors. Our **purée** tests assess how well the blender purées vegetables and boiling water into soup. A very good **ice crush** score means a blender can crush seven ice cubes in a full-sized blender or four ice cubes in a personal blender to a uniform texture similar to a snow cone. Our **noise** score is based on a meter reading of the blender on maximum speed. **Durability** is based on tests in which we crush ice 45 times over two days.

IMMERSION BLENDERS

These handheld tools (also called stick or hand blenders) let you blend ingredients in a separate container—a saucepan of gravy, a bowl of salad dressing, or a pot of soup, for example. They're typically less powerful than full-sized blenders and can't manage the same tasks, such as powering through ice to make frozen drinks, but they're also less expensive. Some come with attachments, such as a whisk, bowl, cup, or food chopper.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** The best immersion blenders in our tests do a great job of blending fruit into yogurt and puréeing soup. Those that come with multiple accessories can be an inexpensive (and compact) solution to your food-prep needs. You might want one with a whisk for whipping cream or a food chopper to make quick work of dicing onions or garlic. The NutriBullet NBI60100, $50, has both.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** You don't need to spend north of $100 to get a good immersion blender. In fact, CR recommends an Amazon Basics model that costs about $40.

If you plan to use your immersion blender in nonstick cookware, look for a model with a blender guard on the "bell" of the immersion blender attachment. That will protect your cookware's surface from the metal mixing blade.

IMMERSION BLENDER

Ninja Foodi Power Mixer System CI101
$100

96 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"An immersion blender with a food chopper attachment can cut, combine, and whip a variety of foods really well."

ARIANNA COGER
Senior Tester

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results		Features + Specs						
			Yogurt blend	Soup purée	Maximum speed (RPM)	Chopper	Whisk	Turbo	Beaker	Speeds	Warranty (yr.)
IMMERSION BLENDERS											
✓ **Ninja** Foodi Power Mixer System CI101	96	$100	⏫	⏫	15,500		●	●		1	1
$ **Amazon Basics** MJ-BH5001W2	91	$40	⏫	⏫	15,000	●	●	●	●	Var.	1
✓ **All-Clad** KZ750D	82	$120	🔼	⏫	14,000			●		Var.	1
NutriBullet NBI60100	73	$50	🔼	❗	14,300	●	●		●	Var.	1
Smeg Retro HBF11	71	$100	❗	⏫	14,300			●		5	1
GE G8H1AASSPSS	71	$70	❗	⏫	15,000	●	●			2	1
Cuisinart CSB-179Y Smart Stick	63	$70	🔼	❗	11,500	●	●		●	Var.	3
Vitamix 67991	62	$150	🔼	❗	14,500					5	3
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 19108	58	$35	🔽	⏫	15,900	●	●		●	2	2
Blendtec Immersion Blender	56	$150	❗	🔼	15,000	●	●		●	Var.	1
KitchenAid KHBBV83PA	52	$160	🔽	🔼	12,500	●	●			1	1

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/blenders.

PHOTO: NINJA

HOW WE TEST: We judge immersion blenders using a **yogurt blend** test, which assesses a model's ability to blend yogurt with frozen fruit (such as peaches), and a **soup purée** test, which tests how well each immersion blender purées vegetables and water for soup.

HAND MIXERS

Whisking egg whites to stiff peaks or whipping cream to top a pie are time-consuming chores when done by hand. But a mixer can make quick, easy work of those tasks and many others, including mixing pancake batter and making cookie dough.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Most hand mixers look similar, but they can differ in the number of speed settings they offer, whether they have a slow-start function to help prevent splattering, and whether their beaters are bare metal or partly covered in silicone, which makes them quieter (see the Breville at right). Some hand mixers come with additional attachments, such as a blender rod that turns the appliance into an immersion blender, a separate attachment for whisking, a dough hook to handle thick dough, or a storage case to keep all of the accessories and parts organized.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Not every model has interchangeable beaters, meaning that you'll have to figure out which beater goes on the right and which goes on the left every time you use it. It's a small but annoying inconvenience. Also steer clear of models with beaters that have center posts, because those can be difficult to clean.

HAND MIXER

Breville Handy Mix Scraper BHM800SILUSC

$130

83 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"Make sure the mixer has a comfortable grip. A good grip makes longer mixing sessions less strenuous."

NICOLE POWELL
Senior Tester

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs				
			Whipping time	Mixing	Convenience	Noise	Dough hooks	Whisk	Interchangeable beaters	Wire beaters	Slow-start function
HAND MIXERS											
Breville Handy Mix Scraper BHM800SILUSC	83	$130	⏫	⏫	⏫	⬆	●	●		●	
KitchenAid Architect KHM7210 7-Speed	75	$90	⬆	⬆	⏫	⬆		●		●	
Smeg HMF01	75	$180	⏫	❙	⬆	⬆	●	●		●	
Hamilton Beach Professional 7 62663	74	$40	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆		●		●	●
Dualit Professional 88520 4 Speed	74	$110	⬆	⬆	⏫	❙	●	●			
KitchenAid KHM6118CU 6 Speed	73	$80	⬆	⬆	⏫	⬆		●		●	
Hamilton Beach Professional 7-Speed 62656	69	$50	❙	⬆	⬆	⬆	●	●	●		●
Toastmaster TM-108HM	68	$15	⬆	⬆	❙	❙			●	●	
Hamilton Beach 62636	68	$30	⬆	⬆	⬆	❙	●	●		●	
Cuisinart Power Advantage HM-70	67	$60	⬆	⬆	⏫	❙		●		●	●
Braun HM5100 9 Speed	66	$90	⬆	⬆	⬆	⬆	●			●	
Cuisinart Power Advantage HM-6P1	65	$50	⬆	⬆	❙	⬆				●	
KitchenAid KHM926	65	$110	❙	⬆	⬆	⬆	●	●		●	

PHOTO: BREVILLE

STAND MIXERS

Stand mixers offer more versatility and power than hand mixers. And because they're freestanding, not handheld, they can be easier to use by those with arthritis or other physical limitations. If you're looking to expand your repertoire in the kitchen, consider a model capable of accepting power attachments such as a pasta maker, veggie spiralizer, or sausage stuffer.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Start by measuring how much space you have between your countertop and your cabinets to make sure you can accommodate the height of the mixer you want. Some mixers have a stationary head and a lift to raise the bowl up to the beater. Others have a tilt head that lifts the beater out of the bowl, which requires more overhead space. Our tested models range from 4 to 10 quarts, so think about how much you're likely to be mixing. A smaller bowl can blend dough for about five dozen cookies; a 7-quart will fit enough for up to 14 dozen.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Stand mixers can be heavy; the heaviest one in our tests weighs 41 pounds. So don't pick a hefty mixer unless it can live permanently on your countertop. If your mixing needs are basic, you can save money if you avoid models with accessories you may use only a few times, if at all.

STAND MIXER
Waring Commercial Luna WSM7L
$840
81 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"Kneading stiff doughs can be tough even for powerful models, so use the speed recommended in your instruction manual to avoid damaging the motor."

STACY CANOVA-TURNER, Market Analyst

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs									
			Whipping time	Mixing	Kneading	Convenience	Noise	Style	Bowl size (qt.)	Speeds	Wattage	Weight (lb.)	Height (in.)	Warranty (yr.)	Single beater style	Whisk	Dough hooks	Takes power attachments
STAND MIXERS																		
✓ **Wolf** Gourmet WGSM100S	83	$800	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	Bowl	7	10	500	29	18	5	●	●	●	●
✓ **Waring** Commercial Luna WSM7L	81	$840	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	Tilt	7	11	350	33	18	2	●	●	●	
Hamilton Beach Professional All-Metal 63240	79	$220	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	Tilt	5	12	450	15	14	5	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Bowl Lift KSM70	79	$600	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	Bowl	7	10	500	27	17	2	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Artisan Series KSM195PSBK	78	$500	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Tilt	5	10	325	21	14	1	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Commercial Series KSM8990ER	78	$950	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	Bowl	8	10	500	28	17	2	●	●	●	●
Instant Pro 140-1560-01	78	$300	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	Tilt	7	10	600	18	14	1	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Classic Series K45SSWH	78	$330	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Tilt	5	10	275	21	14	1	●	●	●	●
GE Profile P8MSASS6TBB Smart	78	$800	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	!	Bowl	7	11	540	41	17	1	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Artisan KSM150PSER	77	$450	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	Tilt	5	10	325	21	14	1	●	●	●	●
Cooklee SM-1551	77	$170	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	Tilt	10	10	660	12	14	5	●	●	●	
Frigidaire ESTM020	77	$105	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	Tilt	5	8	380	7	12	1	●	●		

PHOTO: WARING

⏬ 🔽 ! 🔼 ⏫ WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR SMART BUY

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results					Features + Specs										
			Whipping time	Mixing	Kneading	Convenience	Noise	Style	Bowl size (qt.)	Speeds	Wattage	Weight (lb.)	Height (in.)	Warranty (yr.)	Single beater style	Whisk	Dough hooks	Takes power attachments
STAND MIXERS *Continued*																		
Kenmore Elite 417601 Ovation	77	$405	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	!	Tilt	5	10	500	30	13	1	●	●	●	
GE G8MSAAS1RRS	76	$225	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	Tilt	5	7	350	18	14	1	●	●	●	●
Kenmore Elite KKESM600M	75	$500	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	Bowl	6	10	600	23	17	5	●	●	●	●
SPT MM-106	75	$120	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	Tilt	6	8	550	14	14	1	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Professional 5 Plus KV25G0X	75	$450	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄	Bowl	5	10	450	25	17	1	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Artisan Mini KSM3316XWH	75	$380	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	Tilt	4	10	250	17	13	1	●	●	●	●
Smeg SMF02	74	$540	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	Tilt	5	10	600	19	15	2	●	●	●	●
KitchenAid Professional 600 KP26M1X	74	$550	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄	Bowl	6	10	575	26	17	1	●	●	●	●
Cooks 22327 (JCPenney)	74	$130	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	Tilt	5	12	300	8	14	1	●	●	●	
Commercial Chef CHSM53MB	73	$150	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	Tilt	5	7	350	9	13	1	●	●	●	
Hamilton Beach 63326	73	$100	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	Tilt	4	6	300	9	12	1	●	●	●	
Vivohome X002E5HETF	73	$160	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃	Tilt	8	6	660	12	15	1	●	●	●	
Whall KF9107	72	$180	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃	!	Tilt	5	12	350	8	13	1	●	●	●	
Bosch Universal Plus MUM6N10UC	71	$450	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	!	⌃	!	Open	5	4	500	13	11	1		●	●	●
Hamilton Beach 63385	71	$100	⌃	⌃	!	⌃⌃	⌃	Tilt	4	7	300	9	13	1	●	●	●	
Cuisinart Precision Master SM-50	67	$250	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	Tilt	6	12	500	17	14	3	●	●	●	●
Hamilton Beach 63325	67	$95	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃	!	Tilt	4	6	300	8	12	1	●	●	●	
Deco Chef DGSTMIX01WHT	67	$90	⌃⌃	⌃	!	⌃	⌃	Tilt	5	8	550	14	14	1	●	●	●	●
Hamilton Beach 7 Speed Silver 63392	64	$120	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	Tilt	4	7	300	9	15	5	●	●	●	
Hamilton Beach Eclectrics All-Metal 63232	63	$220	⌃⌃	⌃	⌄	⌃	⌃	Tilt	5	12	400	16	14	3	●	●	●	
Brentwood Appliances SM-1162	50	$55	!	!	⌄	⌃	⌃	Tilt	4	5	250	4	11	1			●	
Hamilton Beach Power Deluxe 64695	50	$50	!	!	!	!	⌄	Tilt	4	6	225	8	14	1			●	
Dash Delish Compact DCSM350	50	$80	!	!	!	⌃	!	Tilt	5	5	350	5	12	1			●	
Hamilton Beach 6 Speed 64655	39	$50	⌄⌄	!	⌄	⌃	!	Tilt	4	6	290	6	14	5		●	●	

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/appliances/mixers**.

HOW WE TEST: For hand mixers: The test for **whipping time** gauges how quickly a mixer can whip heavy cream, and the one for **mixing** evaluates how well it combines ingredients for chocolate chip cookie dough. **Convenience** indicates how easy it is to select settings and insert and eject beaters, and how comfortable and stable the mixer's handle is. **Noise** is measured in decibels using a noise meter. For stand mixers: **Whipping time** assesses how long it takes to whip cream. **Mixing** evaluates how well chocolate chip cookie dough is mixed. **Kneading** scores reflect how much the unit labored, vibrated, or required assistance when kneading bread dough with a dough hook. **Convenience** indicates how easy it is to eject and replace the beaters and bowl, read labeling, and set speeds in a repeatable way. **Noise** is judged based on the mixer's highest speed.

FOOD PROCESSORS & CHOPPERS

When you have a big batch of chopping, slicing, or grating to get through, a food processor is a time-saver. Food choppers have a smaller capacity (1 to 5 cups compared with up to 16 cups for a food processor) and fewer functions. A chopper can grate cheese to top your favorite pasta dish, but it's less likely to be able to prep a full batch of pie pastry the way a food processor can.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Food processors come with different blades and discs, so consider your chopping, shredding, slicing, grating, and mixing needs as you shop. Our top model, the CuisinartPro Custom 11 DLC-8S, $170, lacks a dough blade, for example. The pricier Breville The Sous Chef Pro 16 BFP800XL, $450, has a dough blade, a whipping attachment, and a mini-bowl insert for small batches. These are hardworking appliances, so consider the length of the warranty on the motor. It can range from one to 30 years, with pricier models tending to have the longest ones.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** If noise bothers you, don't be tempted by lower-priced models. Many were fairly loud in our tests. If your main objective is to purée, consider a blender instead (see page 82). None of the food processors below received a top score for that task.

FOOD PROCESSOR
Cuisinart Custom 14 DFP-14BCNY
$250
73 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"You don't have to spend more to get special attachments. The chopping blade, slicer, and shredder most models come with can handle most needs."

GINNY LUI, Senior Test Leader

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs										
			Chopping	Slicing	Shredding	Puréeing	Grating	Noise	Speeds	Height (in.)	Wattage	Warranty, overall/motor (yr.)	Dishwasher-safe	Separate shredding blade	Separate slicing blade	Reversible shredding, slicing blade	French fry/ julienne blade	Dough blade	Whipping attachment
FOOD PROCESSORS																			
Cuisinart Pro Custom 11 DLC-8S	77	$170	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃	⌃⌃	1	15	650	3/5	●	●	●				
Breville The Paradice 9 BFP638	75	$400	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌄	⌃⌃	1	15	625	2/30	●	●	●			●	
Breville The Sous Chef Pro 16 BFP800XL	73	$450	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	–	⌃	1	18	1,200	1/25		●	●	●	●	●	●
Cuisinart Custom 14 DFP-14BCNY	73	$250	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	–	–	⌃⌃	1	15	720	3/5	●	●	●				
Cuisinart Pro Classic DLC-10SY	73	$130	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	–	⌄	⌃⌃	2	14	600	3/5	●	●	●				
Breville the Sous Chef 16 BFP810	71	$500	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	–	⌃	⌃	2	18	1,450	2/30	●	●	●		●	●	
KitchenAid KFP1318BM	71	$200	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	–	–	⌃	2	18	500	1/1	●	●	●				

PHOTO: CUISINART

WORSE ⌄⌄ ⌄ – ⌃ ⌃⌃ BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs										
			Chopping	Slicing	Shredding	Puréeing	Grating	Noise	Speeds	Height (in.)	Wattage	Warranty, overall/motor (yr.)	Dishwasher-safe	Separate shredding blade	Separate slicing blade	Reversible shredding, slicing blade	French fry/ julienne blade	Dough blade	Whipping attachment
FOOD PROCESSORS *Continued*																			
✓ **Magimix** 4200XL	71	$450	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	▲	1	17	950	3/30	●	●	●			●	●
✓ **Breville** the Sous Chef 12 BFP660	71	$300	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	▼	▲	1	17	700	1/10		●	●			●	
✓ **Magimix** 5200XL	70	$550	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	1	18	1,100	3/30	●	●	●			●	●
✓ **Vitamix** 12-Cup Food Processor Attachment 067591	70	$250	▲▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	●	1	20	1,440	3/3	●			●			
✓ **Cuisinart** Elite Collection FP-12DCN	70	$300	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲▲	1	16	1,000	3/10	●	●	●			●	
Braun Easy Prep 8 FP3211SI	69	$130	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	●	2	15	550	3/3	●			●		●	
Oster 3-in-1 Kitchen System BLSTTS-GDK-000-BB	69	$140	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	▼	●	3	15	1,200	3/3	●			●			
Cuisinart Elemental FP-11GMP1	69	$150	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▼	●	2	16	550	3/3	●	●	●				
KitchenAid KFP0919BM Plus	69	$180	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	▲	2	17	250	1/1	●		●	●		●	
KitchenAid KFP0918CU	69	$150	▲▲	▲	▲	●	●	▲	2	17	250	1/1	●			●			
GE G8P1AASSPSS	68	$160	▲	▲▲	▲▲	●	▼	●	2	16	550	1/1	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Cuisinart Elemental FP-8GMP1	68	$100	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	●	2	15	350	2/2	●			●			
Ninja Foodi Ultimate System SS401	67	$240	▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	●	10	15	1,600	1/1	●			●		●	
Hamilton Beach Stack & Snap 70820	67	$100	▲	▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	3	16	450	1/1	●	●	●			●	
Cuisinart FP-7	65	$100	▲	▲	▲▲	●	●	●	1	14	350	3/3	●			●			
Hamilton Beach 70450 Compact	64	$40	▲	▲	▲	●	▲	●	1	11	300	1/1	●			●			
Ninja Professional XL NF701	63	$170	▲	▲	▲	●	▼	●	7	18	1,000	1/1	●	●	●			●	
Cuisinart FP-9CF	62	$150	●	▲	▲	●	▼	●	2	15	350	3/3	●			●			
NutriChef NCFP8	61	$60	▲	▲	▲	●	▼	●	var.	14	600	1/1				●		●	●
Ninja Professional Plus BN601	60	$120	▲	▲	▲	●	●	●	6	16	850	1/1	●			●		●	
Magic Bullet Kitchen Express MB50200	60	$80	●	▲▲	▲▲	●	▼	●	1	14	250	1/1	●			●			
Kenmore KKFP11	60	$110	▲	▲	▲	●	▼	●	1	17	500	2/2	●			●			
Hamilton Beach 70760	59	$65	▲	●	▲	●	▲	●	1	15	500	1/1	●			●			
Hamilton Beach 70730	58	$55	▲	▲	▲▲	▼	▲	▼	2	15	450	1/1	●			●			
Hamilton Beach Stack & Snap 70822F	58	$60	▲	▲	▲	●	▼	▼	2	15	500	1/1	●			●		●	
Black+Decker FP4200B	56	$40	▲	▲	▲	▼	▼	●	3	15	450	2/2	●			●			
Cuisinart Velocity Ultra Trio	56	$150	●	▲▲	▲	▲	●	▼	2	16	750	3/3	●			●			

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results						Features + Specs										
			Chopping	Slicing	Shredding	Puréeing	Grating	Noise	Speeds	Height (in.)	Wattage	Warranty, overall/motor (yr.)	Dishwasher-safe	Separate shredding blade	Separate slicing blade	Reversible shredding, slicing blade	French fry/ julienne blade	Dough blade	Whipping attachment
FOOD PROCESSORS *Continued*																			
Hamilton Beach Professional Spiralizing Stack & Snap 70815	55	$140							2	18	450	5/5	●	●	●			●	
Hamilton Beach Bowl Scraper 70743	55	$40							2	15	450	1/1	●			●			
KitchenAid KFP0718ER	54	$100							3	15	250	1/1	●			●			
Hamilton Beach Stack & Snap 70727	53	$60							2	17	500	1/1	●			●		●	
Black+Decker FP1600B	53	$40							1	15	450	2/2	●			●			
Cuisinart Core Custom FP-110	52	$180							3	15	500	3/3	●			●			

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Test Results				Features + Specs				
			Chopping	Puréeing	Grating	Noise	Weight (lb.)	Speeds	Warranty (yr.)	Bowl handle	Accessories
FOOD CHOPPERS											
✓ **Ninja** Master Prep Professional QB1004	64	$60					3	1	1		40- and 48-oz. pitchers with storage lids
KitchenAid KFC0516BM	59	$60					3	2	1	●	Whisking accessory
Cuisinart Elite CH-4DC	56	$60					3	2	2	●	None
Cuisinart SmartPower CPB-300	56	$80					3	2	3		None
KitchenAid Cordless KFCB519PA	54	$100					3	2	1	●	Whisk attachment, cordless with charger
Cuisinart Mini Prep Plus DLC-2A	53	$40					2	1	2	●	Spatula
Cuisinart EvolutionX RMC-100 Cordless Mini	53	$80					3	2	3	●	Cordless with charger
Proctor Silex 72870	52	$35					3	2	3	●	None
Ninja BL770 Mega Kitchen System	51	$200					5	3	1	●	Dough blade, blender attachment with personal blenders, recipe book
Cuisinart Mini Prep Plus DLC-4CHB	50	$50					3	1	2	●	None
Kitchen Selectives MC-6BL	50	$20					1	1	1		None
Hamilton Beach Stack & Press 72850	50	$20					2	1	1		None

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/foodprocessors**.

HOW WE TEST: Our **chopping** test assesses how well each model chops onions and almonds. **Puréeing** proficiency is judged by processing peas and carrots. We test **grating** using a hard cheese such as Parmesan. Our **noise** tests use a sound meter to measure decibels while operating the appliance at its highest speed. Food processor tests also include slicing and shredding.

WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED

Better Brew Essentials

Drip or pod? A regular cup of joe or an espresso? Full pot or just one cup? If you're a coffee lover, the machine you choose is just as important as your favorite type of bean.

DRIP COFFEE MAKER WITH CARAFE

Ninja DualBrew Pro 12-Cup CFP301
$180

77 OVERALL SCORE

DRIP COFFEE MAKERS

A drip coffee maker heats water from a reservoir and sends it through a filter full of ground coffee into a carafe. It's ideal for someone who drinks multiple cups a day or for a family of coffee drinkers. While brewing a pot takes longer than preparing a single cup with a pod coffee maker, it's much more cost-effective, given the price of pods vs. ground coffee or beans (and you're not discarding a plastic pod with every cup). You can also choose from a wider variety of coffee because the brands, roasts, and flavors available as pods are much more limited. Combination or dual machines, which can brew either a pot of drip coffee from grounds or a single cup from a pod, offer both options.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** We've found several drip models under $50 that earn very good or even excellent scores for brew performance in our ratings, arguably the most important factor for discerning coffee drinkers. (The Hamilton Beach 12-Cup Programmable 49465R, $40, is one.) Note that only three dual coffee makers we tested achieved an excellent rating for this measure, including the Keurig K-Duo Single Serve & Carafe, $150.

If you like your brew a particular way—super-strong for instance—look for a model that allows you to set it to the strength you prefer. Some also have a small-batch setting if you want to make just a few cups without compromising quality. If it takes you hours to finish drinking a pot, consider a thermal carafe, which keeps coffee hot without scorching. Our ratings tell you which type of carafe a machine has, how well the carafe pours, and how comfortable its handle is.

On the single-serve side, some dual coffee makers accept only certain pods. If you often take your coffee to go, also consider the appliance's maximum mug height. A model that can accommodate only a 5-inch-tall cup at most might not fit your favorite travel mug.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** As with many kitchen appliances, some drip coffee makers come with features you might not end up using and shouldn't pay for (such as a built-in grinder if you're fine with preground beans). Also, be aware that 1-to-2-cup drip coffee makers have generally received middling ratings or worse, so unless you're set on small-batch brewing, you may want to choose a larger model.

EXPERT TIP

"Coffee makers with a high brew performance score will extract the most flavor from the beans."

KYAW NAING
Assistant Test Leader

PHOTO: NINJA (PRODUCT), GETTY IMAGES (COFFEE BEANS), SHUTTERSTOCK (COUNTER)

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Brew performance	Convenience	Carafe handling	Brew time	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Programmable	Thermal carafe/ mug	Small-batch setting	Brew-strength control	Dispenser-style
DRIP COFFEE MAKERS WITH CARAFE														
✓ **Cuisinart** DCC-T20 Touchscreen 14-Cup Programmable	90	$130	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	9	15x8x12	●		●	●	
✓ **Cuisinart** PerfecTemp 14-Cup Programmable DCC-3200	87	$100	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	10	14x9x12	●		●	●	
✓ **Cuisinart** Programmable DCC-4000	86	$120	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	8	15x14x10	●		●	●	
✓ **R.W.Flame** 14-Cup Programmable (CM9451-UL)	84	$55	–	–	▲▲	▲	▲▲	10	15x8x11	●		●	●	
✓ **Haden** 14-Cup Programmable (75139)	84	$100	–	–	▲▲	▲	▲▲	9	15x8x11	●		●	●	
$ **Cuisinart** 14-Cup Brew Central Programmable CBC-7200	84	$60	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	9	15x8x10	●		●	●	
✓ **Bunn** HB Heat N' Brew Programmable	84	$140	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	12	17x9x11	●				
✓ **Ninja** 12-Cup Programmable CE201	83	$70	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	9	15x10x11	●		●	●	
$ **Hamilton Beach** 12-Cup Programmable 49465R	83	$40	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	10	13x9x12	●				
✓ **Ninja** Specialty CM401	82	$170	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	7	15x12x10	●		●	●	
✓ **Calphalon** 14-Cup Programmable	81	$90	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	▲	9	15x8x12	●		●	●	
✓ **Cuisinart** Brew Central DCC-1200	80	$100	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲▲	9	15x8x12	●		●		
✓ **Russell Hobbs** 8-Cup (CM8100GYR)	78	$113	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	6	14x7x13	●				
✓ **Cuisinart** DCC-1120 Classic Programmable	78	$80	▲	▲▲	▲	▲▲	▲	9	15x9x11	●		●		
Technivorm Moccamaster KBT (79112)	77	$340	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	●	6	16x13x7		●			
Fellow Aiden Precision	77	$365	–	–	▲▲	▲	▲▲	7	12x9x12	●	●		●	
Oxo Barista Brain 9-Cup 8710100	76	$230	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	●	9	16x14x8	●	●	●		
Bella 14755 With Brew Strength Selector	76	$40	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	9	14x7x12	●		●	●	
Mr. Coffee 12-Cup Programmable (BVMC-EHX12BL-115)	74	$40	▲	●	▲	▲▲	▲▲	8	13x9x12	●			●	
Black+Decker 12-Cup Thermal Programmable CM2046S	74	$60	▲	●	▲	▲	●	11	14x10x12	●	●		●	
DeLonghi 3-in-1 Specialty Brewer ICM17270	74	$170	●	●	▲▲	▲	▲	12	14x8x13					
Cuisinart DCC-3400 12-cup Programmable Thermal	74	$110	▲	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▼	9	15x8x12	●	●	●	●	
Wolf Gourmet Programmable (WGCM100S)	74	$600	–	–	▲	▲	●	6	15x12x11	●	●		●	
Black+Decker 4-in-1 5-Cup CM0755S	74	$35	▲	●	▲	▲	▲▲	6	12x8x11					
Black+Decker CM2036S 12-Cup Thermal	74	$70	▲	●	▲	▲	●	11	14x8x12	●	●	●	●	
Ninja Hot and Cold Brewed System CP307	73	$170	●	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	6	15x12x11	●	●	●	●	
Zojirushi Dome Brew Programmable EC-ESC120	73	$150	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲	10	16x8x11	●		●	●	
Capresso SG220 12-Cup	72	$50	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	9	13x8x11	●			●	
Elite Gourmet 5-Cup (EHC-5055)	71	$20	–	–	▲	▲	▲	7	10x7x9					
Breville Precision Brewer Thermal	71	$330	▼	▲	▲	▲	●	6	16x13x9	●	●	●	●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Brew performance	Convenience	Carafe handling	Brew time	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Programmable	Thermal carafe/ mug	Small-batch setting	Brew-strength control	Dispenser-style
DRIP COFFEE MAKERS WITH CARAFE *Continued*														
Café Specialty Drip (C7CDAAS3PD3)	71	$230	–	–	▲	▲	●	6	14x13x9	●	●		●	
Mr. Coffee 2131131 Programmable Rapid Brew	71	$50	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲▲	7	14x9x11	●			●	
Capresso ST300 Thermal	70	$100	●	●	▲	▲	●	9	14x7x12	●	●	●		
Zojirushi Fresh Brew Plus 10-Cup Thermal (EC-YTC100XB)	70	$185	▲▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	13	15x11x11	●	●			
Bella Pro Series 8-Cup Pour Over (90167)	70	$86	●	●	▲	▲	▲	6	14x15x8					
Mainstays (Walmart) 12-Cup (28035441)	70	$20	▲▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	9	12x7x10	●			●	
Oxo Brew 12-Cup (8721200)	69	$300	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	●	9	15x9x14	●	●	●		
Ninja Hot & Iced XL (CM371)	69	$120	●	▲▲	●	▲▲	▲▲	6	15x13x10	●		●	●	
Braun MultiServe KF9150BK	68	$180	▲	●	●	▲	▲	6	16x13x9	●		●	●	
Braun BrewSense 12-Cup Programmable KF7000BK	68	$90	▲	●	▲	▲	▲	10	14x9x11	●		●		
Cuisinart Extreme Brew 12-Cup Programmable DCC-2650	68	$130	▲	▲▲	▲	▲	▲	8	15x8x10	●		●	●	
Cuisinart Coffee Plus CHW-16	68	$130	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	8	15x8x15	●		●		
Zojirushi Zutto 5-Cup DAC50	67	$80	▲▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	6	11x6x11					
Mr. Coffee 14-Cup Programmable (2143561)	67	$65	▲	●	●	▲▲	▲	9	14x8x10	●		●	●	
Black+Decker 12-Cup Programmable (DCM100B)	66	$40	▲	●	●	▲	▲▲	9	14x9x12	●				
KitchenAid KCM1208DG	66	$100	●	●	▲	▲▲	▲	8	15x7x15	●			●	
Capresso CoffeeTeam GS	66	$230	●	●	▲	▲	▲	9	16x10x12	●			●	
Cuisinart 12-Cup DCC-1500	66	$60	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	8	16x8x13	●				
Haden Dorchester Ultra Programmable	65	$130	–	–	▲	▲	▲▲	9	14x9x9	●				
Oxo 8-Cup 8718800	64	$200	▲	▲▲	▲	●	▼	7	14x7x12		●	●		
Hamilton Beach Easy Brew 12-Cup Switch (49633)	64	$20	●	●	●	▲	▲▲	9	13x9x12					
Cuisinart 10-Cup Thermal Classic DCC-1170BK	64	$100	▲	▲▲	●	▲	●	9	15x9x11	●	●	●		
Salton Jumbo Java FC1667	63	$60	–	–	●	▲▲	▲	8	14x8x12	●				
Haden 12-Cup Programmable (HC03001-US)	63	$80	–	–	●	▲	▲	9	14x8x11	●			●	
Melitta 12-Cup Luxe 66381	63	$230	–	–	▲	▲	●	9	15x15x9	●			●	
Beautiful by Drew Barrymore 14-Cup Programmable	63	$60	–	–	●	▲	▲▲	8	15x10x13	●		●	●	
Cuisinart 5-Cup DCC-5570	63	$42	▲	▲▲	●	▲	▲	8	11x6x12					
Bunn Speed Brew Elite Grey CSB2G	63	$150	▲▲	▲▲	●	●	▲	5	14x8x15					
Hamilton Beach Premium Flavor (46221)	62	$55	●	●	●	▲	▲	9	14x10x11	●		●	●	

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results			Features + Specs						
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Brew performance	Convenience	Carafe handling	Brew time	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Programmable	Thermal carafe/ mug	Small-batch setting	Brew-strength control	Dispenser-style
DRIP COFFEE MAKERS WITH CARAFE *Continued*														
Gourmia 5-Cup GCM3510	62	$18	–	–				6	10x7x10					
Hamilton Beach Craft 8-Cup Automatic or Manual Pour-Over	62	$150						11	14x11x11	●			●	
Hamilton Beach Programmable Front-Fill 46391	61	$90						8	15x8x12	●	●	●	●	
Krups Simply Brew 10-Cup	61	$53						8	13x7x10					
Black+Decker 5-Cup (DCM600B)	61	$22						6	10x7x10					
1- OR 2-CUP DRIP COFFEE MAKERS														
Technivorm Moccamaster Cup-One Brewer	69	$250					NA	6	12x7x11			NA		
Brentwood Appliances Single Cup (TS-112R)	54	$22	–	–			NA	5	10x8x9					
Mr. Coffee Single-Serve Iced and Hot (2153439)	53	$50					NA	3	14x7x11					
Black+Decker CM618	50	$30					NA	4	12x6x7					
Hamilton Beach Flexbrew Plus (49979)	50	$70					NA	4					●	
Brentwood Appliances Single Serve With Mug (TS-111)	50	$40	–	–			NA	3	10x7x8					
Capresso On-The-Go Personal 42505	49	$40					NA	4	12x6x7					
Hamilton Beach The Scoop Single-Serve 47620	49	$41					NA	4	13x6x10			●		
Mr. Coffee Single-Serve Frappe, Iced, and Hot	46	$130					NA	3	14x11x11					
Elite Gourmet Single Serve With Travel Mug (EHC111A)	44	$25	–	–			NA	4						
GRIND-AND-BREW COFFEE MAKERS														
✓ **Melitta** Aroma Fresh Plus 10-Cup	79	$300	–	–				11	17x9x13	●			●	
✓ **Cuisinart** Next-Generation Burr Grind & Brew 12-Cup DGB-800	72	$200						8	17x9x13	●			●	
Breville The Grind Control BDC650BSS	69	$350						8	17x9x15	●	●	●	●	
Black+Decker Mill & Brew CM5000B	67	$80						8	15x13x11	●			●	
Capresso CoffeeTeam TS465	66	$240						8	16x10x13	●	●	●	●	
Capresso CoffeeTeam Pro (487.05)	64	$240						8	17x9x14	●				
Café Grind & Brew Smart (C7CGAAS2TS3)	64	$280	–	–				5	18x15x13	●	●	●	●	
SELF-SERVE DRIP COFFEE MAKERS														
✓ **Cuisinart** Coffee on Demand DCC-3000	77	$95					NA	8	15x10x12	●		●		●
Hamilton Beach BrewStation Summit 4846[4]	65	$60					NA	8	15x9x12	●		●	●	●

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at **CR.org/coffeemakers**.

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results								Features + Specs					
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Brew performance	Convenience	Carafe handling	Single-serve first-cup speed	Single-serve repeat speed	Single-serve temp. consistency	Single-serve size consistency	Single-serve brewing range	Brew time	Maximum mug height (in.)	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)	Programmable	Thermal carafe/mug	Brew-strength control
DUAL COFFEE MAKERS																		
Ninja Espresso & Coffee Barista System	79	$200	⏫	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔽	⏫	➖	6	7.9	16x10x13	●		●
Ninja DualBrew Pro 12-Cup CFP301	77	$180	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔽	⏫	➖	6	8.2	16x10x12	●		●
Brim Triple Brew 12-Cup 50017	76	$100	–	–	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	8	6.75	15x11x13	●		●
Bella Pro Series Single Serve & 12-Cup	75	$40	–	–	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	9	5.0	13x7x15			
Cuisinart Coffee Center 12 Cup (SS-15BKSP1)	71	$130	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	⏫	⏫	🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	9	8.1	15x11x10	●		●
Cuisinart Coffee Center 2-in-1 (SS-16)	70	$150	➖	🔼	➖	⏫	⏫	⏫	🔼	➖	➖	➖	8	7.4	15x11x11	●		●
Cuisinart Coffee Center Barista Bar 4-in-1 (SS-4N1)	69	$300	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	9	7.8	15x13x13	●		●
Mr. Coffee Pod + 10-Cup Space-Saving Combo (BVMC-SS12XTH)	69	$125	–	–	🔼	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	🔽	⏫	➖	6	7.9	15x7x14	●	●	●
Cuisinart Coffee Center Thermal SS-20	68	$200	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔽	⏫	🔼	🔽	🔼	➖	9	7.75	15x11x12	●	●	●
Keurig K-Duo Essential 5000	67	$80	➖	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	8	7.25	13x13x14			
Keurig K-Duo Single Serve & Carafe	67	$150	➖	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	⏫	➖	7	7.2	13x13x14			
Keurig K-Duo Plus 5200	66	$200	➖	➖	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	⏫	⏫	➖	8	7.75	15x10x15	●	●	●
Hamilton Beach FlexBrew Trio	66	$110	⏫	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	➖	➖	🔽	⏫	➖	9	8.0	14x13x12	●		●
Cuisinart Coffee Center Grind & Brew Plus SS-GB-1	65	$230	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	10	8.5	17x12x13	●		●
Mixpresso 2-in-1 Single Cup Coffee Maker	59	$55	–	–	➖	➖		🔼	🔼	🔽	⏫	➖	2	7.5	15x7x10			

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines performance test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that a brand's models will develop problems or break within the first four years of ownership.

Owner satisfaction reflects the proportion of CR members extremely likely to recommend the model they bought. A gray dash (–) indicates that we have insufficient data to provide a brand rating. **Brew performance** reflects the ability to heat water to the optimal range of 195° F to 205° F for the best flavor. **Convenience** evaluates ease of filling the reservoir, cleaning, and more. **Carafe handling** indicates handle comfort, whether the carafe drips while pouring, the balance when full, and ease of emptying.

Combination coffee makers are also evaluated for pod coffee maker criteria, including **first-cup speed** (how quickly a cup is brewed after the appliance is first turned on), **repeat speed** (for subsequent cups), and **single-serve temperature** and **size consistency.**

POD COFFEE MAKERS

If all you really need is one cup, a pod machine might be a good fit for you. Most models in our ratings have very good to excellent owner satisfaction scores based on CR's surveys and turn out a quick first cup. But discerning coffee drinkers should know that the brew quality of these machines may fall short.

▶ **HOW TO SHOP** Convenience is key with this type of coffee maker, as is the ability to turn out fast, consistent cups. That's where CR's convenience evaluations come in. Winners in these tests, such as the Keurig K-Café Smart, $200, are easy to operate, clean, and refill. Models requiring a water refill with every cup and those that can fit only smaller mugs get a middling score here. Also be aware that relying on these machines can come at a steep price. The pods are more expensive than ground coffee, and the machines themselves can be expensive. The CR Recommended Nespresso Creatista Plus, from a brand with excellent owner satisfaction, costs more than $400 and can only accommodate Nespresso-branded pods. And even though Keurig and its K-Cups are almost synonymous with pod coffee, Keurig machines receive a middling score for reliability.

▶ **WHAT TO AVOID** Make sure your favorite mug will fit under the spout. None of the models we tested fit a mug more than 8.1 inches tall, and one couldn't fit a mug taller than 4.6 inches. And if you try to minimize waste, tossing pods day after day may not be for you. A reusable pod that you fill with your own ground coffee may ease your conscience.

POD COFFEE MAKER

Keurig K-Café Smart

$200

81 OVERALL SCORE

EXPERT TIP

"Choose a model that takes more than one pod brand. Nespresso and Illy require their brand of pods, which cost more than widely available K-Cups."

GINNY LUI, Senior Test Leader

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Test Results						Features + Specs		
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	First-cup speed	Repeat speed	Temperature consistency	Size consistency	Brewing range	Convenience	Average coffee temperature (°F)	Maximum mug height (in.)	Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)
POD COFFEE MAKERS													
Nespresso Essenza Mini	88	$170	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	170	5.25	9x5x13
Nespresso CitiZ EN267BAE	85	$320	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	170	6.0	11x9x15
Nespresso Creatista Plus	81	$420	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	–	⌃	165	5.6	12x8x17
Keurig K-Café Smart	81	$200	–	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	–	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	180	7.4	13x10x13
Instant Dual Pod Plus (140-6013-01)	80	$195	–	–	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃	⌃	⌃	175	7.1	13x8x17
Instant Multi-Pod 68 MB	80	$200	–	–	⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	170	7.25	13x7x17
Cuisinart Premium Single-Serve Brewer SS-10	79	$100	–	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	–	⌃⌃	180	7.0	12x10x12
Nespresso Pixie Coffee and Espresso (BEC430TTN1BUC1)	78	$180	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌃⌃	⌄	⌃⌃	⌄	⌃	165	5.7	9x5x13
Keurig K-Supreme Plus Smart	78	$200	–	⌃	⌃⌃	⌃	–	⌃⌃	⌃	⌃⌃	175	7.25	13x10x13

PHOTO: KEURIG

Brand + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results: Predicted reliability	Survey Results: Owner satisfaction	Test Results: First-cup speed	Test Results: Repeat speed	Test Results: Temperature consistency	Test Results: Size consistency	Test Results: Brewing range	Test Results: Convenience	Features + Specs: Average coffee temperature (°F)	Features + Specs: Maximum mug height (in.)	Features + Specs: Dimensions, HxWxD (in.)
POD COFFEE MAKERS *Continued*													
✓ **Bella** Dual Brew (17644)	77	$40	⏫	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	➖	175	4.75	11x5x7
✓ **Instant** Solo Single Serve	76	$70	—	—	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	180	7.0	13x5x12
Bella Pro Series (90113)	75	$100	⏫	➖	⏫	⏫	⏬	⏫	🔽	🔼	140	5.6	11x5x15
Keurig K-Slim	74	$90	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	⏫	➖	🔼	170	7.1	13x5x16
Keurig K-Iced	74	$80	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔽	⏫	➖	🔼	170	7.3	13x6x14
Nespresso VertuoPlus	72	$140	🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	⏫	🔼	155	7.75	13x6x17
Nespresso Vertuo Pop+	72	$110	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	🔼	➖	150	5.5	11x9x15
Cuisinart Grind & Brew Single-Serve DGB-2	72	$150	➖	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	⏫	175	6.4	13x8x12
Cuisinart Soho Single Serve SS-7BK	71	$90	➖	⏫	⏫	🔼	➖	⏫	➖	➖	170	7.1	13x5x12
Keurig K-Brew & Chill	70	$200	➖	🔼	⏫	🔼	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	175	7.7	13x10x16
Keurig K-Café Special Edition Coffee, Latte & Cappuccino Maker K84	70	$199	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	⏫	⏫	➖	🔼	185	7.25	13x16x13
Keurig K-Select	70	$150	➖	🔼	➖	🔼	⏫	⏫	➖	⏫	180	7.25	13x10x12
Suodoka (Walmart) Single Serve K-Pod	70	$65	—	—	⏫	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	➖	170	6.8	11x5x10
Keurig K-Elite	68	$150	➖	🔼	➖	⏫	➖	🔼	🔼	⏫	175	7.2	17x10x13
Amazon Basics AB-1178B	67	$50	—	—	🔼	➖	➖	➖	🔼	🔼	175	7.4	15x7x10
Drinkpod JavaPod	67	$84	—	—	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	180	7.0	12x8x14
Keurig K-Mini Plus	65	$110	➖	🔼	➖	➖	🔼	⏫	➖	🔼	175	7.25	13x5x12
Sifene Single Serve	65	$60	—	—	🔼	🔼	⏬	⏫	➖	🔼	180	6.4	12x7x11
Nespresso Breville Vertuo BNV220CRO1BUC1	65	$220	🔼	⏫	🔼	🔼	⏬	➖	🔼	🔼	145	6.25	12x8x13
Mainstays (Walmart) Single Serve Dual Brew (201963)	64	$20	➖	⏫	➖	➖	🔼	⏫	➖	➖	185	7.0	12x6x8
L'or Barista Coffee and Espresso	60	$160	—	—	🔼	🔼	⏬	⏫	➖	🔼	160	5.4	13x7x17
Farberware Touch Single Serve	59	$40	🔽	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	🔼	180	7.9	15x7x11
Hamilton Beach FlexBrew Dual With Milk Frother (49949)	57	$85	➖	➖	➖	➖	🔼	🔼	➖	➖	180	8.1	14x13x11
Chefman InstaCoffee Max	55	$50	⏬	➖	🔼	🔼	🔼	🔼	➖	➖	170	7.5	14x5x7
Café Valet Barista Single Serve	55	$50	—	—	➖	➖	🔼	🔼	➖	🔽	185	4.6	11x6x11

HOW WE TEST: Overall Score combines performance test results with survey data for predicted reliability and owner satisfaction. **Predicted reliability** estimates the likelihood that models from a given brand will develop problems or break within the first four years of ownership. **Owner satisfaction** reflects the proportion of CR members extremely likely to recommend the coffee maker they bought. A gray dash (—) indicates that we have insufficient data to provide a brand-level rating. **First-cup speed** measures how quickly a cup is brewed when the machine is first turned on. **Repeat speed** reflects how quickly a pod machine makes subsequent cups. **Temperature consistency** reflects how closely the temperature of the second cup matches the first. **Size consistency** indicates how closely the second cup matches the first in volume. **Brewing range** reflects how customizable a pod coffee maker is with regard to brew strength, water volume, or using additional pods. **Convenience** evaluates how easy it is to read markings and controls, operate the coffee maker, refill its water reservoir, and clean it after use.

WORSE ⏬ 🔽 ➖ 🔼 ⏫ BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | $ CR SMART BUY

ROAD REPORT

NEWS & EXPERT ADVICE TO KEEP YOU AHEAD OF THE CURVE™

BMW X3

The redesigned BMW X3 is more powerful and has better equipment, but its just-right size and overall proportions remain the same. Access in and out is easy, and the cabin is both comfortable and futuristic.

CR'S TAKE The X3 is delightful to drive. Its firm suspension gives it confidence-inspiring agility and a composed ride. The turbo-four powertrain makes the X3 quick while also achieving an impressive EPA-rated fuel economy of 29 mpg combined. Overall, the X3 is a nimble, luxurious, and polished small SUV.

BASE PRICE RANGE $49,950-$64,700
DESTINATION CHARGE $1,175
PRICE AS DRIVEN $56,860

AHEAD OF THE CURVE

Learn How to Escape Your Car

The door handles (both inside and out) on many new vehicles **require electricity to work.** If you're in a collision that cuts the power, or if the battery dies, the door handles may not work as expected. Before your next drive, **learn how to manually use the handles.** From inside, some cars require you to pull the interior handle twice to override the electronic latch. Others have a **hidden release lever.** Exterior handles can be even trickier to use without power. Check the owner's manual to learn how to open the doors, or go to **CR.org/escape** to learn how to exit most cars.

THE VITAL STATISTIC

32

The approximate percentage of all motor vehicle deaths that involve drunk drivers. According to data for 2022, 13,524 people died as a result of alcohol-impaired driving. Abstaining can significantly decrease the chance of injury or death, for you and others on the road.

Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

RECALL

Ford

Ford recalled more than 272,000 Bronco Sport SUVs and Maverick pickup trucks to fix faulty 12-volt batteries that could fail while driving, causing the vehicles to suddenly stall. The recalled models may not restart when their engine's stop/start function is in use, and their hazard lights may not operate. This is the second time some of these vehicles have been recalled.

WHAT TO DO Ford dealerships will inspect the battery and replace it with a new AGM battery, if necessary. For more information, call Ford at 866-436-7332.

ASK OUR EXPERTS

If I file a large claim, will my car insurance company cancel my coverage?

An insurer isn't likely to drop you unless you've been charged with drunk driving or you haven't paid your bills, according to Loretta Worters, vice president of media relations at the Insurance Information Institute. If you're filing your first loss claim or if crash damage wasn't your fault, you probably won't have to worry about losing coverage or even paying a higher premium. However, if you've filed multiple claims over a short period of time, your insurer may choose not to renew coverage. If this happens, other prospective insurers can find out, which may make new coverage more expensive. In that case, the key is to shop around.

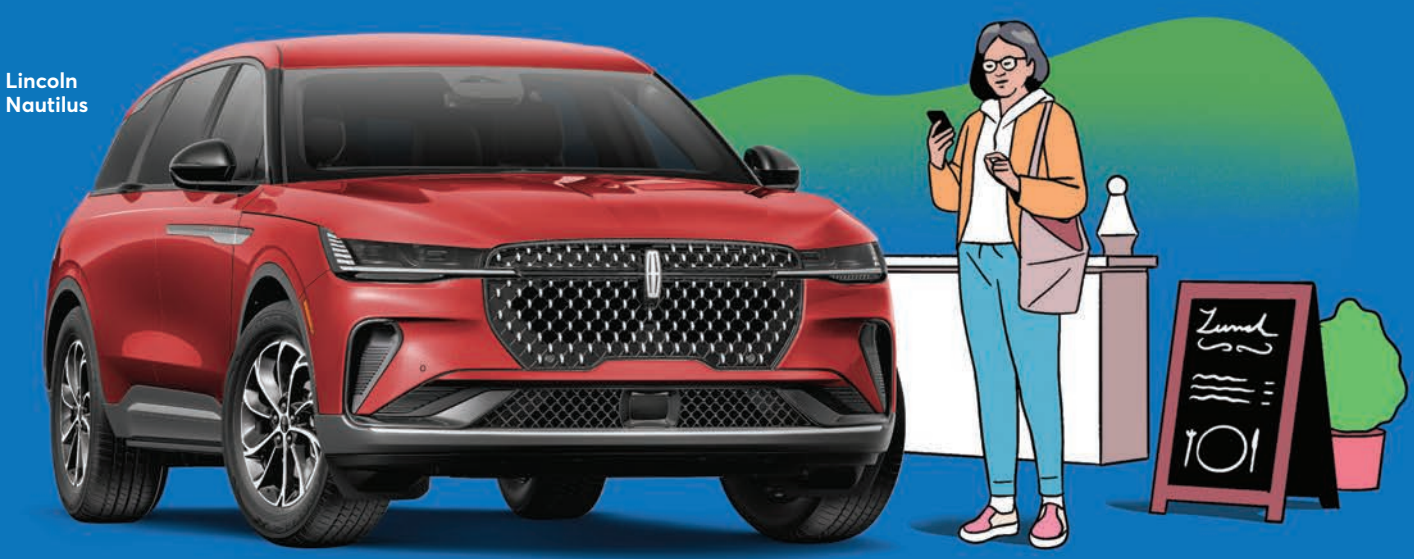
PHOTO: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

The Cars Owners Love Most

Hybrids, sporty cars, and spacious SUVs top our list of the most satisfying vehicles, according to CR member surveys.

BY JONATHAN LINKOV ILLUSTRATIONS BY BRUNO MANGYOKU



WANT TO BE SURE you'll still love your next new car long after the warranty runs out? The easiest way is to use CR's owner satisfaction ratings, which are based on responses from CR members—like you—on more than 300,000 cars, SUVs, trucks, and minivans, including electric vehicles (EVs) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs). You've told us everything that you like about the cars you're driving—such as low ownership costs and strong fuel economy—as well as what you don't like—poor reliability, noisy cabins, and overly complicated controls.

As a car buyer, having this kind of inside information is valuable because some headaches reveal themselves only after six months, a year, or longer. "You can tell during a test drive if there's enough passenger space or if the brakes feel responsive," says Steve Elek, who oversees auto data analytics at CR. "Our owner satisfaction data can show the hidden flaws you may not have noticed—but that owners deal with every day."

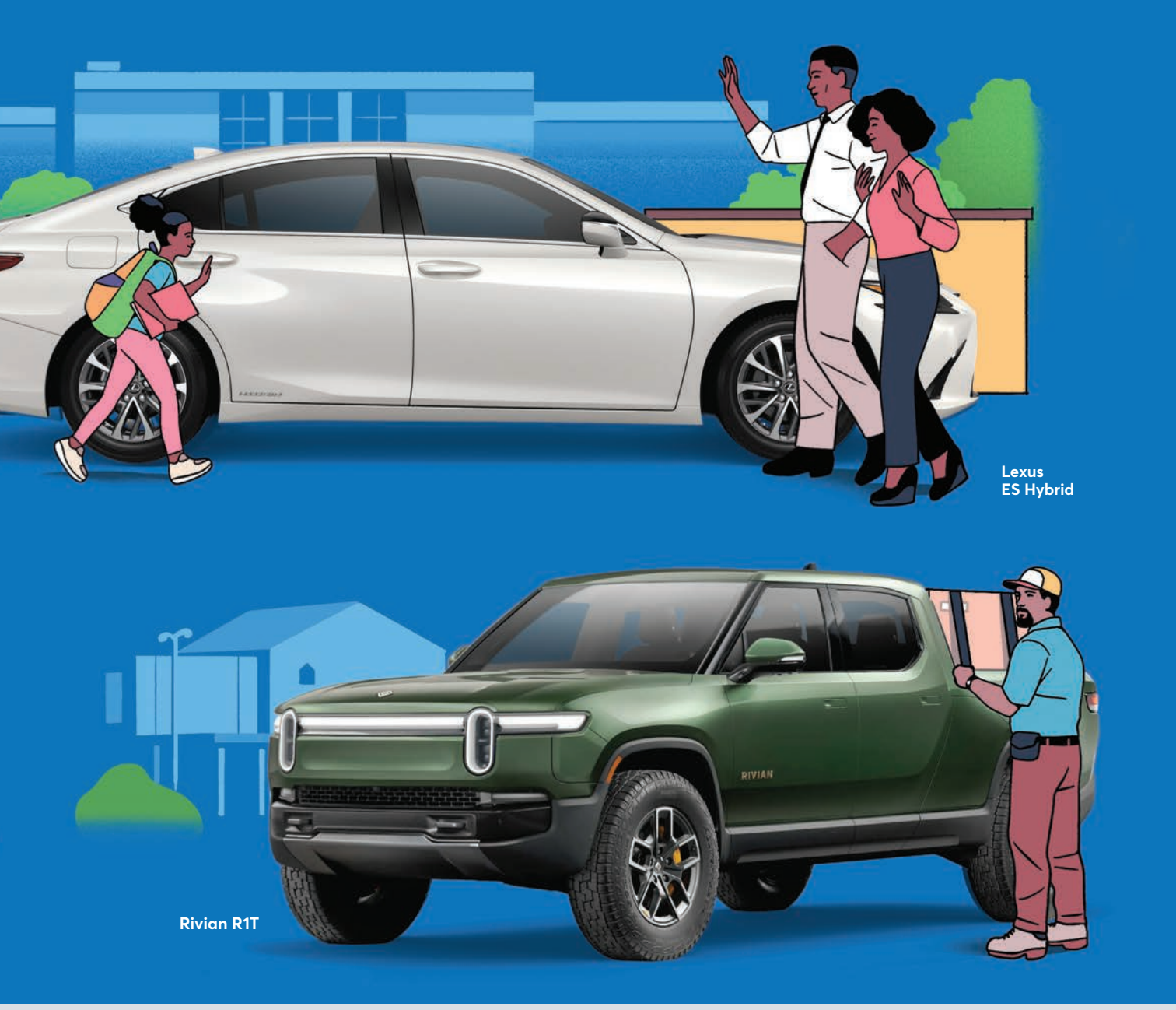
Our satisfaction scores come from how CR members answer this question: Given the opportunity, would you buy or lease your vehicle again? We then calculate that vehicle's score from the percentage of owners who said "definitely yes." (For more on our methodology, see "How We Rate Satisfaction," on page 104.)

Based on our latest survey results, here are the most important findings for car buyers.

Hybrids Take the Lead

Our vehicle ratings are dominated by hybrids with high road-test scores and Overall Scores. And again this year they rank among the most satisfying models.

WORSE — BETTER



Lexus ES Hybrid

Rivian R1T

There are currently 19 vehicles available in both regular hybrid and gas-only configurations. For 15 of those pairs, the hybrid has a higher satisfaction score than the gas-only version, often by a wide margin.

Owners with Lexus and Toyota hybrids are especially happy. In fact, the hybrid version of the Lexus NX scored 20 points higher than the non-hybrid version. That's the largest score difference among the 19 pairs.

Reasons for this include the gas-only NX's noisy engine, lower-than-expected fuel economy, and overall driving

PHOTOS: MANUFACTURERS (CARS)

Most Satisfying and Least Satisfying

PERCENTAGE OF OWNERS WHO WOULD DEFINITELY BUY THEIR VEHICLE AGAIN

92%	Chevrolet Corvette
88%	Rivian R1T
88%	Chevrolet Equinox EV
86%	Lincoln Nautilus
84%	Rivian R1S
84%	Lexus NX PHEV
84%	Lexus ES Hybrid
83%	Toyota RAV4 PHEV
83%	BMW X5
83%	BMW i4

48%	Audi Q4 E-Tron
48%	Nissan Altima
47%	Audi Q8 E-Tron
46%	Infiniti QX60
45%	Toyota Corolla Cross
45%	Mercedes-Benz C-Class
44%	Nissan Sentra
41%	Mazda CX-90 PHEV
39%	Volkswagen Taos
38%	Jeep Compass
34%	Jeep Grand Cherokee PHEV

range. Owners also expressed displeasure at Lexus recommending premium fuel. Meanwhile, many NX Hybrid owners told us that fuel economy and driving range were the main reasons they would buy their SUVs again.

We saw a similar pattern with the Toyota Highlander and Corolla Cross, with owners of the hybrids far happier than those driving gas-only versions.

This isn't surprising. Of 15 ratings categories with at least one hybrid, nine have a hybrid as the top-ranked model, and on average hybrids outscore gas-only models. Why? First, hybrids are usually quicker than gas-only models. Second, the assistance from their electric motors means they accelerate more smoothly, there's less engine noise, and the overall driving experience is calmer. Finally, the extra weight of the hybrid battery often contributes to a more composed ride.

Results for PHEVs were less consistent. Those with long electric-only ranges—such as the Hyundai Tucson, Lexus NX, and Toyota RAV4—outscored their conventional and hybrid versions. But the Jeep Grand Cherokee and Mazda CX-90 PHEVs trailed their gas-only equivalents, with owners citing their short electric range and reliability problems as disappointing.

Owners Love to Have Fun

A car that's exciting to drive, whether it's because of swift acceleration or nimble handling, may show up on our Most Satisfying list even if it has poor reliability or a less-than-standout Overall Score. We've seen that phenomenon year after year with certain models, and this latest survey is no different.

"Just because a vehicle has a low Overall Score doesn't mean it can't still make owners happy," says Jake Fisher, CR's senior director of auto testing. "Getting real use out of generous towing and off-road capabilities might wash away memories of poor fuel economy or reliability headaches."

Sports cars like the Chevrolet Corvette, Ford Mustang, and Mazda MX-5 Miata consistently rank among the survey's most satisfying models despite being difficult to get into and out of, offering limited storage, or requiring pricey maintenance. That's because those vehicles are a treat for owners who willingly endure some compromises for driving excitement.

Even with well-below-average reliability, the Rivian R1S and R1T have been among the most satisfying models both

Top Brands in Comfort, Storage Space, and More

For the second year in a row, Rivian—with its all-electric R1S and R1T—sits at the top of our brand satisfaction list. BMW and Tesla each moved up, to second and third, respectively, while Porsche holds firm in fourth. The remaining six spots are a mix of luxury—Lexus, Lincoln, and Genesis—and mainstream—Chevrolet, Subaru, and Ford—automakers.

We've also broken out our data to show which brands satisfy owners the most in specific areas, including comfort, driving, cabin storage, in-cabin experience and usability, and ownership cost. Use these lists to find brands that score highly in the qualities you care about the most.

COMFORT

Includes seat comfort, cabin noise, and ride comfort, among other factors.

MOST SATISFYING

- Rivian
- Porsche
- Volvo
- BMW
- Cadillac
- Mercedes-Benz

LEAST SATISFYING

- Ram

DRIVING

Takes into account how the vehicle handles and how quickly it gains speed.

MOST SATISFYING

- Porsche
- Tesla
- BMW
- Rivian
- Acura
- Cadillac

LEAST SATISFYING

- Volkswagen

years they were eligible. Owners tell us they love the Rivians' electric range, style, performance, interior room, and handling capability. Those factors outweigh the reliability issues and owner complaints about the lack of Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, the complicated process required to adjust the air vents, and limited cabin storage.

Bigger Is Often Better

Buyers looking for the most satisfying experience should turn their attention to a midsized SUV rather than a compact model. These larger models often have roomier, quieter interiors and tend to deliver a smoother ride. They also have higher satisfaction scores, on average.

As you might expect, subcompact and compact models disproportionately populate our Least Satisfying list or have the lowest Overall Satisfaction Scores.

Even if you think you want a compact SUV, keep in mind that they come with some inherent compromises. "Compact models often have less sound insulation, so they can be noisy," says CR's Elek, "and their suspensions aren't as sophisticated, which results in a rougher ride." The effect is that many of them also have low road-test scores.

For example, eight of the 11 subcompact SUVs in our survey results have the lowest satisfaction ratings. Less than 40 percent of Volkswagen Taos and Jeep Compass owners would buy these SUVs again, which places them among the worst performers in the survey. Of the 23 compact SUVs with satisfaction scores, eight score at the bottom. Only three midsized SUVs had less than 50 percent of owners willing to buy them again.

CABIN STORAGE

Includes cup holders and dashboard and center console storage but not the trunk.

MOST SATISFYING

- Chrysler
- Tesla
- Lincoln
- GMC
- Honda
- Chevrolet

LEAST SATISFYING

- Audi

USABILITY

Includes the ease of using the in-car electronics, including pairing a phone and streaming audio.

MOST SATISFYING

- Rivian
- Porsche
- Mercedes-Benz
- Chevrolet
- Honda
- GMC

LEAST SATISFYING

- Volkswagen

OWNERSHIP COST

Includes costs for fuel, insurance, maintenance, and repairs.

MOST SATISFYING

- Rivian
- Tesla
- Hyundai
- Cadillac
- Toyota
- Mazda

LEAST SATISFYING

- Ram

WORSE — BETTER

Owner Satisfaction by Brand

		PERCENTAGE OF OWNERS WHO WOULD DEFINITELY BUY AGAIN
1	Rivian	86%

2	BMW	73%
3	Tesla	72%
4	Porsche	71%
5	Lexus	70%
6	Chevrolet	70%
7	Lincoln	70%
8	Subaru	68%
9	Genesis	68%
10	Ford	67%
11	GMC	67%
12	Hyundai	67%
13	Toyota	67%
14	Honda	66%
15	Cadillac	65%
16	Kia	64%
17	Volvo	63%
18	Mazda	61%
19	Acura	61%
20	Audi	60%
21	Buick	59%
22	Ram	56%
23	Chrysler	55%
24	Nissan	54%
25	Volkswagen	54%
26	Mercedes-Benz	53%

27	Jeep	51%

Ford Mustang GT

Most and Least Satisfying Models in Their Class

Even cars that don't rank high in overall satisfaction can excel in ways that matter to you, such as how comfortable they are or whether the infotainment system is easy to use. Similarly, some models with high satisfaction scores may have issues that will make you want to consider other options. For this section, we asked owners to rate their satisfaction when considering their vehicle's seat and cabin comfort, driving, cabin storage, in-cabin experience and usability, and ownership cost. Their feedback and corresponding scores will help you identify standout models. Use these charts to guide you toward cars that are most likely to deliver on what you want from your next car.

HOW WE RATE SATISFACTION: Results are from the 2024 Annual Auto Surveys, involving more than 300,000 vehicles. Data from the 2022 to 2024 model years (plus a few 2025 models) were averaged, provided a vehicle wasn't significantly changed over that time. Some ratings might be based on a single model year. The score is based on the percentage of owners who responded "definitely yes" to the question of whether they would buy the same vehicle if they had to do it all over again (considering price, performance, reliability, comfort, enjoyment, etc.). Ratings and scores for the factors were determined based on the percentage of owners who said they were very satisfied.

COMFORT

Owners of the top performers praised the ride and seat comfort of their vehicles; one Ridgeline owner noted the comfort their pickup provided on long-distance trips. On the other end of the chart, Miata owners said they wanted more supportive seats and better ride comfort, and some had difficulty getting in and out.

MOST SATISFYING

COMPACT SUVs
Subaru Forester ↑

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Jeep Grand Cherokee

SMALL CARS
Volkswagen Jetta

SPORTS CARS
Ford Mustang

MIDSIZED PICKUPS
Honda Ridgeline

LEAST SATISFYING

COMPACT SUVs
Ford Escape PHEV

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Jeep Wrangler

SMALL CARS
Hyundai Venue

SPORTS CARS
Mazda MX-5 Miata

MIDSIZED PICKUPS
Jeep Gladiator

PHOTO: FORD (MUSTANG)

DRIVING

One RAV4 PHEV owner called it fast and fun, while another praised its "superb performance [and] outstanding handling." The Macan's "build quality and driving dynamics" stand out, with owners loving its handling and performance. Atlas owners disliked the SUV's fuel economy, power, and transmission.

MOST SATISFYING

COMPACT SUVs
Toyota RAV4 PHEV ↑

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Porsche Macan

MIDSIZED CARS
Honda Accord Hybrid

SMALL/MIDSIZED PICKUPS
Ford Maverick

LEAST SATISFYING

COMPACT SUVs
Kia Sportage

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
Volkswagen Atlas

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
BMW X1

MIDSIZED CARS
Nissan Altima

SMALL/MIDSIZED PICKUPS
Nissan Frontier

CABIN STORAGE

Santa Fe and Santa Fe Hybrid owners found plenty of space for people and cargo, while numerous XC40 owners praised the small removable trash can that sits in the center console. Audi's small and large SUVs both got demerits for their small cup holders and limited storage spaces, while the RZ's lack of a glove box was a universal complaint.

MOST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
Hyundai Santa Fe/ Santa Fe Hybrid ↑

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Volvo XC40

LUXURY 3-ROW SUVs
Infiniti QX60

ELECTRIC SUVs
Chevrolet Equinox EV

SMALL CARS
Kia Soul

LEAST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
Mazda CX-90

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Audi Q3

LUXURY 3-ROW SUVs
Audi Q7

ELECTRIC SUVs
Lexus RZ

SMALL CARS
Toyota Corolla Hatchback

USABILITY

Owners praised their Fords for the large infotainment display and the BlueCruise hands-free driving assistance system. Subaru drivers disliked the touchscreen climate controls and the infotainment system's laggy response. Volkswagen ID.4 owners panned the touch-sensitive buttons and the ones that are unlit at night.

MOST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Ford Bronco ↑

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
Kia Telluride

ELECTRIC SUVs
BMW iX

SPORTS CARS
Ford Mustang

FULL-SIZED PICKUPS
Ford F-150 Hybrid

LEAST SATISFYING

MIDSIZED 2-ROW SUVs
Subaru Outback

MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs
Volkswagen Atlas

ELECTRIC SUVs
Volkswagen ID.4

SPORTS CARS
Subaru WRX

FULL-SIZED PICKUPS
Toyota Tundra

OWNERSHIP COST

Volvo, Lexus, and Toyota buyers all love their PHEVs' all-electric range and fuel economy, while happy Blazer EV owners cited the range, with one noting the ease and "cost of charging at home." Service costs were a headache with the Mercedes-Benz and Porsche, while many Audi Q8 E-Tron owners disliked their EV's short range.

MOST SATISFYING

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Volvo XC60 PHEV ↑

LUXURY 2-ROW SUVs
Lexus RX PHEV

ELECTRIC SUVs
Chevrolet Blazer EV

SMALL CARS
Toyota Prius PHEV

SMALL/MIDSIZED PICKUPS
Ford Maverick Hybrid

LEAST SATISFYING

LUXURY COMPACT SUVs
Mercedes-Benz GLC

LUXURY 2-ROW SUVs
Porsche Cayenne

ELECTRIC SUVs
Audi Q8 E-Tron

SMALL CARS
Toyota Corolla Hatchback

SMALL/MIDSIZED PICKUPS
Ford Ranger

WORSE — BETTER

What Those Warning Lights Mean

BY BENJAMIN PRESTON

EVERY CAR HAS its own language of light-up hieroglyphics on the dashboard. They're your car's way of asking for help. But those lights are not always easy to interpret.

Regardless of what a warning light means, most manufacturers color-code them like a stoplight. Red generally means something serious has happened and the car should not be driven. Amber means caution: If the light stays on, get it checked at your earliest convenience. Green, blue, white, or sometimes yellow is usually for minor things like the windshield washer fluid needs refilling or an oil change is due.

Here are some of the most common indicators, and advice from CR's auto pros on what to do if they light up when you're on the road.

OIL PRESSURE OR COOLANT TEMPERATURE

WHAT IT MEANS Typically red, these lights mean the engine can't lubricate or cool itself adequately. Left unchecked, either problem will cause the engine to overheat. The oil pressure/level light typically looks like an old-fashioned oil dropper bottle–like what the Tin Man in "The Wizard of Oz" carries. The coolant light is supposed to look like a thermometer in liquid.

WHAT TO DO IF IT LIGHTS UP Either one indicates a serious problem that can cause irreversible engine damage. Pull over and turn the engine off as soon as it's safe and have the car towed to a mechanic.

CHECK ENGINE

WHAT IT MEANS This light, which usually looks like a 1960s-vintage V8 with a carburetor on top, means there's an issue with the emissions control system–the components that reduce the pollution created as the engine burns fuel. Any number of problems can cause an abnormal reading; for example, one of the many sensors, the wiring, or some hoses may have failed.

WHAT TO DO IF IT LIGHTS UP If this light is flashing or the car is making strange noises, pull over and get towed to a repair shop. If the light is on but the car seems okay, drive yourself to a shop soon–a hidden problem might be damaging the catalytic converter.

TIRE PRESSURE

WHAT IT MEANS Low pressure in one or more of the tires will cause the tire pressure monitoring system (TPMS) to illuminate a warning light. The problem could be from a puncture, a slow leak, or cold weather–all of which affect tire wear, handling, and safety.

WHAT TO DO IF IT LIGHTS UP Driving for more than a mile or two on a tire with very low pressure is dangerous and can ruin the tire. Head to a gas station as soon as possible–most have air compressors with built-in tire pressure gauges. Fill the tire(s) to the pressure shown on the sticker located inside the driver's door. If the light comes on again, have a tire shop check for leaks.

TRACTION CONTROL

WHAT IT MEANS When a tire that's getting power from the engine loses grip, the traction control system (TCS) activates and this light flashes. This usually happens because the car has detected that one wheel is spinning significantly faster than the others, so it limits power and uses the brakes to maintain grip. This improves overall traction and prevents dangerous skidding.

WHAT TO DO IF IT LIGHTS UP If it flashes briefly, don't panic–that just means the TCS was active. If the light is on continuously, there's a problem with the system or it is turned off. It can be dangerous to drive without TCS, so take the car to a mechanic as soon as possible.

ILLUSTRATION BY KIERSTEN ESSENPREIS

MIDSIZED THREE-ROW SUVs

Chevrolet Traverse

A Comfy Cruiser With a Noisy Engine

74
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

HIGHS Comfortable ride, roomy second-row seat, generous cargo capacity, GM's excellent Super Cruise active driving assistance system

LOWS Noisy engine, some unintuitive controls

POWERTRAIN 328-hp, 2.5-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; all-wheel drive

FUEL 20 mpg on regular

PRICE $40,700-$56,100 base price + $1,395 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $49,460

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

BY MIKE MONTICELLO

THE REDESIGNED TRAVERSE remains a solid option in the midsized three-row SUV segment. It isn't the quietest, best-riding, or most refined in the category, but it does many other things well. Its roomy cabin and spacious cargo area are high points. But it has a big new demerit: its raspy-sounding turbocharged four-cylinder engine, which replaced a polished V6.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The 328-hp, 2.5-liter turbocharged four-cylinder works well, providing strong acceleration along with a fairly smooth-shifting transmission. But the small engine often sounds like it's laboring, with a loud, unrefined snarl. It remains competitively quick within the class, but its 20 mpg overall trails some rivals that use a smoother six-cylinder.

The Traverse has a settled and controlled ride, and sails easily over all kinds of roads. For a sizable SUV, the handling is solid; the steering has decent precision, and the Traverse proved secure when pushed to its limits around our track. But it's odd that models with optional all-wheel drive are delivered in front-wheel-drive mode; the owner has to press a button to engage AWD. After that, it stays on.

CABIN COMFORT

The cabin is pretty plain. The stitching and trim accents are tasteful, but there are too many plastic panels for the $50,000 price.

Up front, headroom is generous, and the armrests are well-placed, though they're light on padding. We found the driver's left footrest to be too vertical and close to the seat for optimal comfort. Our testers struggled to get truly comfortable in the front seats. Their flat shape doesn't do a good job keeping occupants from sliding about.

The dual captain's chairs in the second row (vs. a conventional bench seat) are wide and flat but highly adjustable, and they offer plenty of room. As with most competitors, the third row is best reserved for kids due to the tight headroom and knee room.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

Some controls are either inconvenient or unintuitive. For example, the left steering wheel stalk has a complicated secondary function for the windshield and rear-window wipers, making it easy to accidentally activate them. The right stalk serves as the gear selector, and its operation can take some getting used to.

Most climate functions have physical buttons, but some, such as "sync," can be accessed only through the infotainment screen. Because of the small size of some icons, we found the touchscreen difficult to use while driving.

MIDSIZED OFF-ROAD SUVs

Toyota Land Cruiser

Great Off-Road, but Compromises Abound

61
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 57

HIGHS Very adept off-road

LOWS Clumsy handling, jiggly ride, excessive wind noise, unrefined engine and transmission

POWERTRAIN 326-hp, 2.4-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder hybrid engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 20 mpg on premium

PRICE $56,700-$61,470 base price + $1,450 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $69,770

AFTER A THREE-YEAR hiatus, the redesigned Land Cruiser is smaller, less expensive, and more fuel-efficient than the previous generation, which are all improvements. It's a true-to-its-roots off-roader with a modern twist: a turbo-hybrid powertrain. But we can't overlook its shortcomings in refinement, ride comfort, and handling agility.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The 2.4-liter turbocharged four-cylinder is augmented by an electric drive, and together they produce a hearty 326 hp. But the powertrain feels uncouth. It starts with an abrupt takeoff followed by some bumpy shifts. The engine gets loud when pushed, and vibrations can be felt through the steering wheel. It has strong midrange power out on the road, but it's slower from 0 to 60 mph than most of its competitors. And even though it's a hybrid, 20 mpg overall (on the required premium fuel) is unimpressive.

Handling is clumsy, with slow steering that delivers little feedback. The body leans way over through turns, and the tires—which are primarily designed for off-road use—squeal quickly in protest. It doesn't deliver a smooth ride, either. Bumpy roads bring an unsettled experience, with lots of shaking and jiggling while tossing occupants around.

In many hybrids, the regenerative braking system can cause the brake pedal to produce odd sensations at low speeds. But the Land Cruiser's brakes feel pretty normal.

All Land Cruisers come with the hardware to get down and dirty off-road, including locking rear and center differentials, full-time four-wheel drive, and ample ground clearance. It climbed up the craggy ascent at our test track's rock hill like a mountain goat.

CABIN COMFORT

The front seats are comfortable, with sufficient side bolsters to hold you in place. The rear seat has plenty of headroom but isn't all that pleasant to sit on. Foot space is surprisingly tight for such a large vehicle, and the seat has a flat shape with firm padding.

Lifting cargo to put inside can be a challenge. The rear load floor is fairly high off the ground, likely due to the combination of the solid rear axle and hybrid battery.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

The sheer number of buttons, knobs, and levers in the Land Cruiser's cabin might look overwhelming at first, but the refreshingly analog interior eliminates many of the headaches of modern touchscreen controls. Still, it would be helpful if the 12.3-inch infotainment screen had a knob for tuning and making selections in other menus.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

FULL-SIZED PICKUP TRUCKS

Ram 1500

Powerful, Capable, and Pleasant to Drive

68
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 83

HIGHS Smooth and quick acceleration, comfortable ride, quiet cabin, roomy rear seat, automatic 4WD available

LOWS High step-in hampers access, long wet stopping distance

POWERTRAIN 420-hp, 3.0-liter turbocharged 6-cylinder engine; 8-speed automatic transmission; four-wheel drive

FUEL 18 mpg on regular

PRICE $40,275-$87,075 base price + $1,995 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $61,785

LIKE ITS PREDECESSOR, the refreshed Ram 1500 pickup has the highest CR road-test score of any full-sized truck. It remains the best-driving pickup in a crowded field of competitors, with impressive levels of ride comfort and overall refinement.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The biggest change to the Ram 1500 from last year is that the optional V8 engine has been dropped in favor of a new twin-turbocharged six-cylinder. While that may seem like a downgrade, the new inline-six is smooth and powerful. Aside from losing the V8's satisfying rumble, we didn't feel the least bit cheated. The new engine makes the truck quicker, shaving more than a second off the V8's 0-to-60-mph time while eking out 1 extra mpg.

The smooth-shifting eight-speed automatic remains, and the optional Auto 4WD mode helps the truck stay secure in slippery conditions.

As before, the 1500's rear suspension uses coil springs (rather than the typical leaf springs), which means this truck rides more comfortably than any other full-sized pickup. Handling is relatively responsive, thanks to a natural steering feel and minimal body roll through turns. But we were disappointed by the Ram's long stopping distances from 60 mph on wet pavement.

Our truck is rated to tow 8,220 pounds, and the payload is a reasonably stout 1,735 pounds. Those numbers aren't as bragworthy as some rivals', but given the Ram's comfortable ride and civility, we think it strikes a good balance for most people.

CABIN COMFORT

Our testers found the Ram's front seats fairly comfortable and reasonably supportive, with enough side bolstering to hold them in place through corners without being overly restrictive. The wide center console won't hem you in, either. There's also a ton of headroom and well-placed armrests. In crew-cab models such as our tested truck, the rear seat is very spacious, with lots of headroom and knee room.

The Ram's tall stance and high floor mean it can be a bit difficult to get up into the cabin. We also found it baffling that our $60,000-plus truck didn't have keyless entry.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

The Ram's updated controls remain mostly user-friendly. The optional 12-inch portrait-oriented touchscreen responds promptly to commands and gives the cabin a high-tech vibe. But some knobs and buttons are too far away from the driver. We appreciate the large, easy-to-use physical climate buttons bordering each side of the screen.

SPORTS CARS

Mini Cooper

A Hoot to Drive, but Controls are Frustrating

70
OVERALL SCORE

ROAD-TEST SCORE 76

HIGHS Agile handling, quick acceleration, short stopping distances, excellent fuel economy

LOWS Stiff ride, uneven low-speed acceleration, unintuitive controls, tight rear seat

POWERTRAIN 201-hp, 2.0-liter turbocharged 4-cylinder engine; 7-speed dual-clutch automatic transmission; front-wheel drive

FUEL 33 mpg on premium

PRICE $28,950-$48,100 base price + $1,175 destination charge
Total MSRP as tested $36,995

THE MINI COOPER retains its charming styling, minimalist interior, and fun driving experience. The latest iteration has nimble handling and hearty acceleration, but there are compromises in the form of irregular power delivery at low speeds and a very stiff ride. It's also unfortunate that BSW and RCTW are only optional.

DRIVING EXPERIENCE

The sporty Cooper S version we bought and tested packs a 2.0-liter turbocharged four-cylinder with 201 hp. The standard seven-speed, dual-clutch automatic transmission performs quick and decisive gear shifts, contributing to the spirited nature of the driving experience. But the combination of lag from the turbocharger and some transmission quirks brings a noticeable delay when you get going, sometimes followed by an abrupt burst of power. Low-speed driving isn't smooth.

Once fully underway, the Mini is much more enjoyable to drive because of its frisky power and sporty engine sound. Its performance numbers are strong, with a quick 0-to-60-mph sprint of 6.5 seconds. Fuel economy is commendable, at 33 mpg overall on premium.

Quick steering, limited body roll, and strong cornering grip make the Cooper swift and entertaining on a twisty road. It's not surprising that it aced our avoidance maneuver test. But its ride is jarringly stiff. If you're thinking of buying a Cooper, brace yourself for how much bumps and potholes will pound the interior. The car is loud, too, with lots of wind and tire noise.

CABIN COMFORT

The Cooper is surprisingly roomy up front. The bucket seats drew a mixed response from our test drivers. They're nicely shaped and hold you in place well, but they're a bit too firm. Getting into the cramped rear seat is extremely difficult.

It's odd that the current speed and other vehicle information are on the center-dash infotainment screen, out of the driver's direct view. This is partly rectified by a pop-up head-up display.

Limited space for small items compromises everyday livability. The door pockets are tiny and there's no bin underneath the center armrest. Trunk cargo space is also tight.

CONTROLS AND USABILITY

A large circular touchscreen at the center of the dashboard serves triple duty as driver information, climate control, and entertainment hub. Unfortunately, most of the controls are super-frustrating to use. A simple task, like changing the temperature, requires extreme precision to press tiny icons, made all the more difficult by the Mini's stiff, bouncy ride.

PHOTOS: JOHN POWERS/CONSUMER REPORTS

Safety Term Glossary: AEB automatic emergency braking; **BSW** blind spot warning; **LDW** lane departure warning; **LKA** lane keeping assistance; **RCTW** rear cross traffic warning.

Ratings › **A Winning Mix** This tested group includes the family-friendly Traverse, the fun-to-drive Cooper S, a well-mannered Ram 1500, and the off-road-worthy Land Cruiser.

Make + Model	Overall Score	Price	Survey Results		Road-Test Results											ADAS
			Predicted reliability	Owner satisfaction	Road-test score	Overall mpg	CR range, miles (E = EPA electric range)	Seat comfort, front/rear	Usability	Noise	Ride	Fit + finish	Routine handling	Acceleration, 0-60 mph, sec.	Dry braking, 60-0 mph, ft.	BSW/RCTW
MIDSIZED 3-ROW SUVs																
✓ **Subaru Ascent** 2.4T	80	$43,867			90	22	420							8.0	129	S
✓ **Honda Pilot** 3.5L	79	$50,240			85	21	380							7.7	129	S
✓ **Hyundai Palisade** 3.8L	79	$43,415			85	21	395							7.1	132	S
✓ **Kia Telluride** 3.8L	76	$40,855			92	21	390							7.2	127	S
✓ **Chevrolet Traverse** 2.5T	74	$49,460			76	20	440							7.3	131	S
✓ **GMC Acadia** 2.5T	70	$49,190			77	20	440							7.6	132	S
✓ **Ford Explorer** 2.3T	68	$49,940			74	21	370							7.4	136	S
✓ **Toyota Grand Highlander** 2.4T	68	$49,457			81	22	390							8.0	134	S
Nissan Pathfinder 3.5L	65	$46,375			81	21	385							7.6	138	S
Mazda CX-90 3.3T	64	$48,670			85	24	435							7.2	128	S
Volkswagen Atlas 2.0T	53	$47,121			78	20	360							7.7	124	S
MIDSIZED OFF-ROAD SUVs																
Toyota Land Cruiser 2.4T+H	61	$69,770			57	20	355							8.5	132	S
Ford Bronco 2.7T	48	$53,505			51	18	385							7.0	149	O
Land Rover Defender 3.0T	47	$70,710			57	18	435							6.9	147	S
Jeep Grand Cherokee 4xe 2.0T+E	45	$64,795			75	21	25[E]+400							6.1	142	S
FULL-SIZED PICKUPS																
Ram 1500 3.0T	68	$61,785			83	18	480							5.8	139	S
Ford F-150 2.7T	67	$55,535			75	19	485							6.7	143	S
Chevrolet Silverado/ GMC Sierra 1500 5.3L	64	$50,225			78	17	400							6.9	136	O
Toyota Tundra 3.4T	54	$53,393			71	17	540							6.3	140	O
4/5-SEAT SPORTS CARS																
✓ **Subaru BRZ** 2.4L	74	$32,115			86	27	360							6.3	117	O
✓ **Toyota GR86** 2.4L	72	$32,206			83	28	375							6.3	119	O
✓ **Mini Cooper S** 2.0T	70	$36,995			76	33	380							6.5	123	O
✓ **Honda Civic Si** 1.5T	70	$28,315			74	32	390							7.3	134	O
Volkswagen Golf GTI 2.0T	68	$36,539			85	28	365							6.4	127	S

› Digital and All Access members can find the latest, complete ratings at CR.org/cars. When you're ready to buy, configure the vehicle and find the best price in your area by clicking the green "View Pricing Information" button on the model's dedicated page.

HOW WE TEST: The **Overall Score** combines **road-test results,** survey data for **predicted reliability** and **owner satisfaction**, and **advanced safety,** which includes crash-test results and the availability of crash-prevention features, such as automatic emergency braking, pedestrian detection, blind spot warning, and rear cross traffic warning. O means the system is optional on at least some trim levels; S means the feature is standard on all trims. We deduct points if a model's active driving assistance system has inadequate direct driver monitoring.

WORSE — BETTER | ✓ CR RECOMMENDED | CR GREEN CHOICE

Index

THIS INDEX LISTS ALL THE ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THE MAGAZINE OVER THE PAST 12 MONTHS (INCLUDING THIS ISSUE). FOR INDEXES COVERING THE PAST FIVE YEARS, GO TO **CR.ORG/5YEARINDEX**.

A

Air conditioners, window ... May/Jun 25, 20
  ratings ... May/Jun 25, 24
Air fryers ... Aug 24, 18; May/Jun 25, 72
  ratings ... Aug 24, 22; May/Jun 25, 73
Air purifiers ... Jan/Feb 25, 17
  better deal ... May/Jun 25, 113
Alternative medicine ... Jan/Feb 25, 28
Anti-scam guide ... Mar 25, 24
Ant-proofing your home ... Jul 24, 13
Appliances
  kitchen ... May/Jun 25, 70
  reliability ... Sep 24, 34
Artificial sweeteners ... Oct 24, 22

AUTOMOBILE RATINGS

Acura ZDX ... Mar 25, 57
BMW 5 Series ... Aug 24, 58
BMW i5 ... Oct 24, 57
BMW X2 ... Nov/Dec 24, 110
Cadillac Lyriq ... Sep 24, 58
Chevrolet Blazer EV ... Aug 24, 57
Chevrolet Colorado ... Sep 24, 58
Chevrolet Traverse ... May/Jun 25, 107
Ford Escape PHEV ... Jul 24, 57
Ford Ranger ... Mar 25, 58
Honda Prologue ... Jan/Feb 25, 109
Hyundai Kona ... Jul 24, 58
  Electric ... Sep 24, 57
Hyundai Santa Fe ... Oct 24, 58
  Hybrid ... Oct 24, 58
Kia EV9 ... Jul 24, 57
Lexus GX550 ... Jan/Feb 25, 108
Lexus RX 450h+ ... Sep 24, 57
Lexus TX 350 ... Jul 24, 58
Lexus TX 500h ... Jul 24, 58
Lincoln Nautilus Hybrid ... Nov/Dec 24, 109
Mercedes-Benz E-Class ... Oct 24, 57
Mini Cooper ... May/Jun 25, 110
Mini Countryman ... Mar 25, 57
Ram 1500 ... May/Jun 25, 109
Subaru Forester ... Mar 25, 58
Tesla Model 3 ... Oct 24, 58
Toyota Camry ... Jan/Feb 25, 110
Toyota Land Cruiser ... May/Jun 25, 108
Toyota Tacoma ... Nov/Dec 24, 108
Volkswagen Atlas ... Aug 24, 58
Volvo XC60 PHEV ... Aug 24, 57

AUTOMOBILES & AUTO EQUIPMENT

3-row SUVs
  better deal ... Jan/Feb 25, 113
Audi A6 vs. Lexus ES ... Sep 24, 61
Best & Worst lists 2025 ... Apr 25, 12
Brand Report Card ... Apr 25, 34
Buick Envista vs. Kia Soul ... Aug 24, 61
Cadillac XT6 vs. Hyundai Palisade ... Jul 24, 61
Car rental savings ... Jul 24, 56
Comfortable cars ... Aug 24, 50
  ratings ... Aug 24, 54
Coming in 2025 ... Apr 25, 16
Electric vehicles
  charging guide ... Apr 25, 18
  fastest & slowest charging ... Mar 25, 15
Fender benders, how to handle ... Mar 25, 56
Insurance
  getting lower rates ... Apr 25, 30
  provider ratings ... Apr 25, 33
Leasing vs. buying ... Jul 24, 52
Lexus TX vs. Kia Telluride ... May/Jun 25, 113
MPG
  cars with best ... Sep 24, 14
  how to improve ... May/Jun 25, 13
New cars 2024
  getting a deal ... Nov/Dec 24, 78
  ratings ... Nov/Dec 24, 85
New cars 2025
  ratings ... Apr 25, 36
  reviews ... Apr 25, 46
Oil, how to check ... Nov/Dec 24, 107
Owner satisfaction ... May/Jun 25, 100
Pedestrian safety ... Jan/Feb 25, 5
Pollution reduction ... Jul 24, 5
Reliability
  most & least
    reliable cars ... Mar 25, 50; Apr 25, 84
  ratings ... Apr 25, 86
Safest cars ... Oct 24, 46
  ratings ... Oct 24, 51
Safety features
  automatic emergency braking ... Aug 24, 5
  timeline ... Oct 24, 12
Safety rating standards ... Mar 25, 5
Sales tactics, dishonest ... Sep 24, 5
Terminology ... Apr 25, 97
Tires, longevity ... Jan/Feb 25, 100
  ratings ... Jan/Feb 25, 104
  retailer ratings ... Jan/Feb 25, 103
Top picks for 2025 ... Apr 25, 6
Toyota Prius vs. Hyundai Elantra Hybrid ... Mar 25, 61
Used cars
  best & worst 2025 ... Apr 25, 80
  buying guide ... Sep 24, 50
  former rental cars ... Sep 24, 56
  safest ... Apr 25, 24
  selling tips ... Aug 24, 56
Warning light decoding ... May/Jun 25, 106
Winter driving emergency kits ... Jan/Feb 25, 16

B–D

Better deal
  3-row SUVs ... Jan/Feb 25, 113
  air purifiers ... May/Jun 25, 113
  bathroom scales ... Oct 24, 61
  blenders ... Aug 24, 61
  cookware ... Sep 24, 61; Mar 25, 61
  electric toothbrushes ... May/Jun 25, 113
  fitness trackers ... Aug 24, 61
  grills ... Jul 24, 61
  leaf blowers ... Oct 24, 61
  luggage ... Oct 24, 61
  mattresses, latex ... Jan/Feb 25, 113
  portable generators ... Sep 24, 61
  sheets ... Jul 24, 61
  toasters ... Jan/Feb 25, 113
  TVs, 65-inch ... Mar 25, 61
Blankets ... Mar 25, 11
Blenders ... May/Jun 25, 82
  better deal ... Aug 24, 61
  immersion, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 85
  ratings ... May/Jun 25, 83
Burgers ... Sep 24, 11
Cable TV vs. streaming services ... Jul 24, 24
  streaming device ratings ... Jul 24, 31
Candy, 100-calorie portions ... Oct 24, 14
Car rentals ... Nov/Dec 24, 76
Cell service ... Jan/Feb 25, 40
  provider ratings ... Jan/Feb 25, 45
CFPB lawbreaking company registry ... Oct 24, 5
Chain restaurant sandwiches ... Mar 25, 13
Chevron deference ... Oct 24, 5
Chicken, salmonella in ... Nov/Dec 24, 5
Cleaning tips
  dust ... Aug 24, 24
  eliminating smells ... Oct 24, 34
  laundry ... May/Jun 25, 45
  lint and pet hair ... Sep 24, 13
  stains ... May/Jun 25, 40
    holiday ... Nov/Dec 24, 15
  tiles and grout ... Aug 24, 11
Clothes dryers ... Jan/Feb 25, 82
Coffee, iced ... Sep 24, 16
Coffee makers
  drip ... May/Jun 25, 92
    ratings ... May/Jun 25, 93
  pod, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 97
Cookware
  better deal ... Sep 24, 61; Mar 25, 61
  frying pans ... Oct 24, 16
Cordless drills ... Aug 24, 16
Credit card late fees ... Jul 24, 5
Credit reports ... Aug 24, 5; Sep 24, 5
Cruises ... Nov/Dec 24, 74
Data collection, in-car ... Nov/Dec 24, 5; May/Jun 25, 5
Defective products ... Jan/Feb 25, 60
  retailer satisfaction ratings ... Jan/Feb 25, 65
Defensive driving ... Jan/Feb 25, 107
Dental health ... Jan/Feb 25, 66
Detergents
  dish ... Jan/Feb 25, 11
  laundry ... Jan/Feb 25, 95
Dishwasher deals ... May/Jun 25, 14
Drills, cordless ... Aug 24, 16
Dust control ... Aug 24, 24
  timeline ... Aug 24, 12
  vacuum ratings ... Aug 24, 33

E–G

Ear pain ... May/Jun 25, 12
Electric toothbrushes
  better deal ... May/Jun 25, 113
Emergency kits, winter driving ... Jan/Feb 25, 16
Energy bars ... Jan/Feb 25, 52
Energy labels ... May/Jun 25, 15
Eye health ... Nov/Dec 24, 52
Fake product reviews ... Jan/Feb 25, 5
Fire extinguishers for home ... Oct 24, 11
Fitness trackers
  better deal ... Aug 24, 61
Flooring ... Oct 24, 18
  ratings ... Oct 24, 21
Food processors, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 89
Food safety
  10 risky foods ... May/Jun 25, 28
  children's cassava snacks ... Oct 24, 5
  Red Dye No. 3 ... May/Jun 25, 5
  timeline ... May/Jun 25, 12
  when cooking at home ... May/Jun 25, 36
"Forever chemicals" ... Aug 24, 5
Frozen treats ... May/Jun 25, 11
Frying pans ... Oct 24, 16
Funeral planning ... Aug 24, 44
Furniture tip-over safety ... Jan/Feb 25, 5
Garbage bags ... Oct 24, 13
Generators, portable
  better deal ... Sep 24, 61
Grains, microwavable pouches ... Aug 24, 14
Granola ... Jul 24, 40
  ratings ... Jul 24, 42
Grills
  accessories ... Jul 24, 12
  better deal ... Jul 24, 61
Grocery staples ... Mar 25, 32

H–K

Hamburgers ... Sep 24, 11
Hand mixers, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 86
Heat management ... Jul 24, 34
  home equipment ... Jul 24, 37
Heel pain ... Jan/Feb 25, 12
Home gyms ... Jan/Feb 25, 20
  equipment ratings ... Jan/Feb 25, 25
Home health aides ... Jan/Feb 25, 46
Home task help ... May/Jun 25, 64
Hotels ... Nov/Dec 24, 73
Ice cream ... Jul 24, 14
Iced coffee ... Sep 24, 16
Icemakers ... Aug 24, 12
Kitchen gadgets ... May/Jun 25, 17

L–P

Laptops ... Nov/Dec 24, 20
  accessories ... Nov/Dec 24, 24
  ratings ... Nov/Dec 24, 25
Laundry ... Jan/Feb 25, 74
  all-in-one machines ... Jan/Feb 25, 91
  detergents ... Jan/Feb 25, 95
  dryers ... Jan/Feb 25, 82
  stain removal tips ... May/Jun 25, 45
  timeline ... Jan/Feb 25, 12
  washer/dryer pairs ... Jan/Feb 25, 88
    compact ... Jan/Feb 25, 92
  washers ... Jan/Feb 25, 76
Leaf blowers
  better deal ... Oct 24, 61
Line waits, tips for skipping ... Oct 24, 28
Luggage
  better deal ... Oct 24, 61
Mattresses ... Mar 25, 40
  latex, better deal ... Jan/Feb 25, 113
  ratings ... Mar 25, 47
Medical bills
  protecting yourself ... Nov/Dec 24, 64
  tips, before paying ... Mar 25, 14
  when traveling abroad ... Jul 24, 15
Medication reminders ... Oct 24, 12
Memory boosting tips ... May/Jun 25, 48
Microwaves, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 75
Mixers
  hand, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 86
  stand, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 87
Money management for retirement ... Oct 24, 40
Natural cures ... Jan/Feb 25, 28
Outdoor equipment ... May/Jun 25, 18
Overdraft fees ... Mar 25, 5
Paper towels ... Jul 24, 11
Party snacks ... Jan/Feb 25, 18
Pathway lights, solar-powered ... Sep 24, 15
Photo tips, smartphone ... May/Jun 25, 16
Pillows ... Sep 24, 18
  ratings ... Sep 24, 22
Plastics in food ... Sep 24, 5
Portable generators
  better deal ... Sep 24, 61
Power snow shovels ... Nov/Dec 24, 18
Products to avoid ... Nov/Dec 24, 113

R–S

Ranges ... Mar 25, 18
  ratings ... Mar 25, 22
Retirement money management ... Oct 24, 40
Salmonella in chicken ... Nov/Dec 24, 5
Scales, bathroom
  better deal ... Oct 24, 61
Scams timeline ... Mar 25, 12
School food, healthy ... Mar 25, 5
Sheets
  better deal ... Jul 24, 61
Shopping tips
  easy returns ... Jan/Feb 25, 18
  paying for quality ... May/Jun 25, 56
  saving money online ... Nov/Dec 24, 14
  supermarkets ... Aug 24, 34
Smartphones
  apps ... Nov/Dec 24, 58
  photo tips ... May/Jun 25, 16
  water exposure ... Jul 24, 16
Smartwatch safety features ... Aug 24, 13
Smells, eliminating ... Oct 24, 34
Social media ... Aug 24, 40
Solar-powered pathway lights ... Sep 24, 15
Stain removal ... May/Jun 25, 40
  holidays ... Nov/Dec 24, 15
Stand mixers, ratings ... May/Jun 25, 87
Streaming services vs. cable TV ... Jul 24, 24
  streaming device ratings ... Jul 24, 31
Sugar substitutes ... Oct 24, 22
Sunscreens ... Jul 24, 18
  ratings ... Jul 24, 21
Supermarket shopping ... Aug 24, 34
Supplements ... Sep 24, 24
  timeline ... Sep 24, 12

T–Y

Tea guide ... Nov/Dec 24, 44
  brewing tips ... Nov/Dec 24, 50
Tipping guide ... Jul 24, 46
Tissues ... Mar 25, 14
Toaster ovens ... Mar 25, 16; May/Jun 25, 78
  ratings ... May/Jun 25, 78
Toasters ... May/Jun 25, 80
  better deal ... Jan/Feb 25, 113
  ratings ... May/Jun 25, 80
Top product picks ... Nov/Dec 24, 28
  timeline ... Nov/Dec 24, 14
Travel
  booking tips ... Nov/Dec 24, 70
  documents ... Aug 24, 15
  medical bills abroad ... Jul 24, 15
TV programming timeline ... Jul 24, 12
TVs
  65-inch, better deal ... Mar 25, 61
  picture settings ... Sep 24, 12
Unsafe products on Amazon ... Nov/Dec 24, 5
Vacuums, ratings ... Aug 24, 33
Video doorbells, hacking ... Jul 24, 5
Warm product deals ... Jan/Feb 25, 13
Washing machines ... Jan/Feb 25, 76
Water bill, reducing ... Oct 24, 15
WiFi troubleshooting ... Mar 25, 12
Yogurt ... Sep 24, 42
  ratings ... Sep 24, 47

The Better Deal

Many of the products we test at CR earn high ratings for their impressive performance—but some are also a really great value. They have most (if not all) of the attributes of other top-rated products at a much lower price. Check out the deals we found for you this month.

LUXURY 3-ROW SUVs

LEXUS TX
$55,140-$77,210 **76**

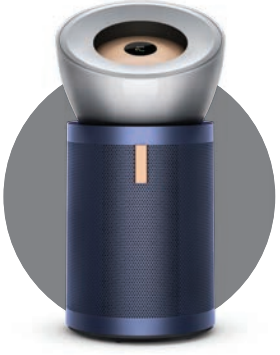
KIA TELLURIDE
$36,390-$53,685 **76**

THE BETTER DEAL

THE LOWDOWN

READ A DESCRIPTION of the Lexus TX and it seems packed with promise, outfitted with all the luxury features one would expect in a high-end SUV. But in person it's actually a bit basic for the money. The Kia Telluride, on the other hand, impresses us year after year for its combination of a smooth V6, comfortable ride, and quiet, well-designed interior. And even the highest trim level costs less than the base price for the Lexus TX.

AIR PURIFIERS



DYSON BIG + QUIET BP03
$1,000 **69**

THE BETTER DEAL

BLUEAIR BLUE PURE 511i MAX
$140 **68**

THE LOWDOWN

BOTH OF THESE MODELS will do an impressive job of cleaning the air in a midsized room (150 to 350 square feet). In our tests, the Dyson proves slightly more effective at both low and high speeds. But it's quite noisy at low speed—a potential problem if you want to use it in a bedroom. The Blueair is quieter at low speed. Our testers also find it easier to use than the Dyson, and it has an app you can employ as a remote control, a nice perk. The biggest difference is the price: It costs far less up front, and you'll spend less on filters each year, too: $72 vs. $105 for the Dyson.

ELECTRIC TOOTHBRUSHES

ORAL-B iO SERIES 10
$400 **85**

THE BETTER DEAL

PHILIPS SONICARE 4100 SERIES
$50 **80**

THE LOWDOWN

THE ORAL B is truly an excellent electric toothbrush. Our testers give it top scores for plaque removal and find it quiet and easy to use, with a long battery life. The Philips also gets teeth clean and sparkly. It is a little louder, the battery doesn't last quite as long, and it only has two speeds (the Oral B has seven). But with a savings of $350, you might not care.

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